Siru Aura

WOMEN AND MARITAL BREAKDOWN IN SOUTH INDIA

Reconstructing Homes, Bonds and Persons

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1. INTRODUCTION

Opening a House

Madhu is humming contently to herself throughout the house opening ceremony of her house. *"I am 100 percent satisfied"*[1] she smiles to me. The long, multi phased process of her and her father building the house is nearly complete. They are moving in next week although the building of the upstairs, which will be leased out, will still continue. The main ritual for the house will be performed over the forthcoming evening and night and which is an auspicious time as determined by consulting an astrological calendar with regard to Madhu's horoscope. Relatives from Madhu's father's side are arriving to witness it. Madhu's maternal relatives are not expected: Madhu's mother and mother's mother have died and Madhu's marital break up with her mother's younger brother twenty years ago also harmed kin relations with the mother's other brothers.

Usually the couple who move into a house perform the ritual in order to free the house from evil and harmful influences. The ritual focuses on *homa*[2], i.e. sacrificing fire, and includes the series of *pujas,* i.e., worship and the chanting mantras. As Madhu has no husband and her father is a widower, Madhu's sister and her husband are the main performers of the ritual led by three *puzaris*, i.e., priests. Madhu's sister and her husband represent the married couple that is needed to bring auspiciousness to

[1] The italicised sentences in quotes are my informants' expressions recorded from interviews, discussions and observations. Some of them are translations from the local language (usually Kannada) into English.

[2] Italicised words are transcribed from Kannada. Italicised words from other local languages are mentioned specifically.

the new house. Their inter-caste marriage of *Brahmin* husband and *Gowda* wife is not an issue anymore. On the contrary, it may have enhanced their family position in comparison to Madhus's natal kin relatives as the sister's family follow Brahmin eating habits, traditions and rituals and interact with their Brahmin friends. Now Madhu is *"too busy"* hosting the relatives with tea and biscuits, handling practical matters, talking to us and drawing, with her nieces and nephews, a design called *rangoli*, on the front of the house together that she misses the main ritual and photography. The nightlong purification ritual is followed by the inviting of good spirits and gods to bless the house and by bringing a cow – the most auspicious first enterer – into the house and, finally at dawn by the "sacrificing" of a pumpkin by Madhu's sister's husband.

The following morning, Madhu looks even more content and joyful. *"I am so happy I can't express myself,"* she whispers to me. More relatives – e.g. her other sister's husband's brother with his family and Madhu's step-brother's wife – are arriving. Soon Madhu's colleagues from her office enter the house with their families handing Madhu white envelops. I have, with Madhu, earlier visited their own house opening ceremonies or their children's marriages. Neighbours also drop in. Madhu is the unquestioned hostess of the house during this reception stage of the house opening ceremony. She welcomes everyone, invites them to eat from the banana leaves provided, and smiles proudly to the photographers with her guests. Madhu's father keeps company with the elder male guests, including relatives and Madhu's boss. Madhus's sister and her husband are helping with practical arrangements but they otherwise now stay in the background. Cheerful voices fill the house. Around 50 people visit the house during the day. After lunch the guests leave with their presents, the colleagues with coconuts and the relatives with sari blouses or pieces of clothing.

Before the opening ceremony Madhu's father was talking about "Madhu's house" while Madhu was talking about "the house my father is building." Madhu was grumbling about her father's dominating role as an engineer while planning the house and guiding the construction work – the shelves were placed too high for Madhu and the father upset neighbours. Nevertheless, the *puja*-room is now placed into the privacy of Madhu's room instead of in the hall as her father had first planned. A week after the house opening ceremony, we are talking about ownership of the house. Madhu is going to pay a large amount of rupees for

her share of the house next month, and she is determined that she will be registered as the owner of the house. However, her father is already talking in a dubious way about its ownership – ' why make a fuss about money in any case Madhu would have to pay some type of housing costs similar to rent,' he says. Madhu thinks she has cause for concern: the father sold their previous house in order to build two farm houses for his son, Madhu's step-brother. Whatever Madhu or her sisters give to their father, e.g. clothes, sheets of cloth, will end up with the children of this son. According to Madhu, her father loves the grandchildren of his son more that he loves Madhu or her sisters. If Madhu is not on the alert now, her house will end up with them after the father passes away one day.

One of the crucial issues in the above description is that Madhu is a divorcee. The opening of Madhu's house introduces the themes of this study. This is a study of divorced, separated and deserted women from different socio-religious backgrounds in the city of Bangalore in South India. Particularly, this is a study about homes, bonds and persons before and after marital breakdown. Instead of trying to catch the solidity indicated by these concepts – homes, bonds and persons – I will focus on the processes and flexibility embedded in them and the interdependence between them in their socio-cultural context. Homes, bonds and persons are all first constructed, then fractured by marital break up and gradually reconstructed through pain and creativity and by interaction and transactions between the persons. Simultaneously, kinship and gender relations become questioned and renegotiated. In the local Kannada-language the expression *manee* refers both to a physical house *(manee*=house, home) and an ideological or space "home" where one has a sense of belonging which grows through interaction and by transactions with the family group living in a house. In South India, living in a house and home means living the other people: the people and their relations make a house (see also Daniel 1984, 111). Their importance becomes further highlighted in the urban context of temporary housing – in contrast to the "house" of Levi-Strauss's (e.g. 1987, 151-177) "house-based-society" inspired from noble houses of medieval Europe as well as their more exotic counterparts (e.g. the *numayma* of Boas) that as a grouping *endures* through time, the continuity being assured through succession, marriage and through the holding on to fixed and movable property and through the transmission of names, titles and prerogatives (Carsten and Hugh-

Jones 1995, 7). Generally South Indian houses, like people, are also said to be porous and constantly in a state of flux. In her study of a Tamil family, Trawick (1996, 87-88) used the concept of "houseflows" instead of "households" as, according to her, where people live are better seen as points of confluence than as "holds" in any stable sense, much like the body as some Tamils consider it. Houses – their doors and windows – are open, and most of them are constructed of mud and thatch, so that they are not long-lasting but rather impermanent. Similarly, people easily change residence from house to house (ibid.). Daniel (1984, 114) also equates Tamil houses with persons (and urs i.e. villages), who are seen as of a substance that can be contaminated and changed by mixing it with other substances. According to him, houses are conceived, born, grow up, live, and interact very much like human beings do (ibid., 161). Moreover, Daniel points out the rule of incompletion that should be followed, along with the three other rules, while constructing a house (ibid., 138-139).[3] The house as a structure is not static and complete; rather, it is forever in a state of becoming, developing and expanding. The rule of incompletion implies process, movement, change, transformation and perennial potential. Above all, it marks the flux of life (ibid., 134). In addition, it also characterises housebuilding as a process. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995, 3-4) reason: if people construct houses and make them in their own image, so do they also use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups.

The illustration of Madhu's house opening ceremony shows ritual interplay and transactions within kin and beyond kin. Sharing food and eating together mark what those people have in common – kin, a working place, the neighbourhood – as well as increase what they share. Rituals as well as everyday interactions and sharing at home create and strengthen the bonds between people. Besides, *"relatives 'make' the functions,"* I was told. Similarly Carsten (2004, 35) suggests that the qualitative density of experiences in the houses we inhabit lead people to assert that kinship is *made* in houses through the intimate sharing of space,

[3] The rule of incompleteness has two potential explanations (ibid., 132-134). Firstly, incompleteness is like a blemish or fault that does not invite the evil eye to itself as readily as an unblemished one would. Secondly, the fact that the house is incomplete holds out the hope for future structural additions. Daniel (ibid.) gives another example of the rule of incompletion at work in the principles underlying the giving the gifts. A gift cash is generally given in an odd-numbered sum that is both a blemish and an auspicious promise of an attempt on the part of the giver to complete the gift later.

food and nurturance that goes on within domestic space. At least in urban South India, building, paying or renting a house, opening a house by purifying and blessing it and later making a house by living in it are all family issues. However, the example of Madhu illustrates the flexibility of kin relations (sisters can replace each other, descendants can replace parents, step-brothers can replace brothers, a sister's husband's brother can replace the sister's family) and even in caste relations (a sister's inter-caste marriage, mixing with colleagues of different castes and religions). Importantly, it questions the inflexibility kin relations are so often characterised by: marriages can be broken and both affinal and consanguineal kin relations can be put an end to, at least temporarily.

Houses are ritual centres but also material shelters and financial investments. Money establishes the owner of the house but it also creates and manifests the bonds of people or the loss of them. It exposes the direction of care and affection (from the father to the step-brother's family instead of to Madhu and her sisters). Moreover, consideration of the ownership of Madhu's house demonstrates the links to existing gender and kinship hierarchies and their practical consequences (will the house end up with the step-brother's family after all?). It raises questions about whether a house can be owned by building it, by registering it or by everyday activities and practices. Thus, it illustrates the critical interplay between an actor and an existing power structure and between form and everyday practices. While houses, like Madhu's, are designed and constructed by people, the actors (e.g. mainly by Madhu's father, partly by Madhu with her wishes, concretely by the construction workers), and their transactions, the structure simultaneously both gives room and prevents their actions (too high shelves but the sensible placement of a *puja* room for Madhu) and it is, simultaneously, manoeuvred by the their intentions and actions. Similarly Madhu's and other divorced and separated women's actions take place and need to be analysed and understood within their socio-cultural context, including kinship, caste and gender hierarchies as well as religious and legal systems that are all part of an ongoing power struggle. Like Evans-Pritchard (1940, 262) I will look into the "relations between groups of person within a system of groups" rather than the "individual-centred interaction systems" or "non-groups" of the approach of Homans (1951) (for critics see Boissevain (1968, 542-543). Moreover, although I will look at the strategies of persons within the structure, I do not view "the system" as the cumulative outcome of indi-

vidual choices and strategies in order to advance their power by strategic choices and coalition, as suggested by Barth (1959a; 1959b; for critics see Davis 1973). Instead, I will focus on the social, legal and kinship relations within their socio-cultural ground of South India that grows from the interrelationship between actors and structure. As Keesing (1998, 263) guides us: "we need to stay close to the realities of humans choosing and acting. But at the same time we need to understand the forces that shape their action." Thus, I will explore the women's motivations and articulations of the cultural code of conduct and interrelations between structures, actors' motivations and questions of power, as exemplified by Fruzzetti and Tenhunen (2006). I will seek to cover the following questions: How does the socio-cultural structure of kinship, caste and gender hierarchies and the system of relations they indicate both prevent and allow Madhu's and other divorced and separated women's actions? And yet how is this socio-cultural structure of kinship, caste and gender hierarchies simultaneously manoeuvred by them and their actions?

The importance of the houses, for "the house" as a social group in Lévi-Strauss's (e.g. 1987) sense as well as for the urban South Indian houses of this study, is grounded to a notion of the house as a source of the symbolic power that does not reside in the house as an isolated entity, but in the multiple connections between the house and the people it contains (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, 44). Among the first sentences that I learnt in my Kannada language course in Bangalore was an important and frequently asked question: *Nimma maneeli yaaru yaaru idaree*? Who *all (yaaru yaaru)* are living in your house/home? The presupposition was that there are many people living in your house. I was supposed to regret that "only" we two – me and my husband lived in our house. Further one single middle-aged female classmate was advised to lie about her penitent living condition by our empathic Kannada teacher. In South India, the people and their relations make a house and home: they are a more real building material of the house than bricks or mud. Moreover, houses of people and relations are connected with other houses. A person, especially a woman, needs a house in order to live a decent life, to be related to other family members, first, in her natal home and, then later, in her affinal home.

The significance of houses in this study lies in their importance to the main figures of this study, i.e., the women whose marriage has broken down in the City of Bangalore, South India. Like Madhu, each and every

divorced and separated woman, from the richest to the most impoverished women, from the highly educated and sophisticated to the illiterate women from various religious backgrounds all talked constantly about houses: they were lacking shelter, they longed for or saved for "a house of their own", they constructed or rented it or, finally, like Madhu, fulfilled their dream of it. The marital breakdown crystallises the multiple meanings of the house through negation and often makes "homemaking" a conflicting process that illuminates the interrelations between person and kin, agent and structure. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995, 4) point out much like our bodies the houses in which we live are so commonplace, so familiar, so much a part of the way things are that we often hardly seem to notice them. It is only under exceptional circumstances such as marital breakdown and the "homelessness" which follows it, that we are forcibly reminded of the house's central role and fundamental significance. Thus I will mainly explore houses and the relations that make houses and homes in order to learn about the divorced and separated women as persons – what it means to be a social agent in their historical and cultural context or/and what defines being a person, or a human being for these women, and, through them to learn about being a person in their society generally.[4] Consequently, I will explore various ways how the divorced and separated women construct their lives – their homes, their bonds and themselves as persons and as members of their kin – through interaction before and, especially, after the marital breakdown. I will also look at flows of money as they manifest these bonds. More broadly and theoretically, this is a study of the concepts of person and of the processes of constructing persons of gender and agency and of constructing kinship in South India.

Kinship and Marriage

Marriage is the key concept of this study through its negation. Indian marriage has had an important role in the development of the anthropo-

[4] As "self" often implies what we might consider to be a psychological entity, such as an ego, I use the broader, more open term "person". As Lamb (2000, 250) points out, beliefs about what it is to be a person in any cultural-historical setting might include notions or practices concerning some of followings: a subjective sense of self; a soul or spirit; the body; the mind; emotions; agency; gender or sex; race, ethnicity or caste; relationships with other people, places or things; a relationship with divinity; illness and well-being; power; karma or fate; and the like.

logical understanding of kinship. Maine (1861) "found" a living example of the patriarchal family of ancient times, a joint family in India and established his evolutionary theory about the movement of progressive societies that has hitherto been a movement from the "status" of kinship groups to the "contract" of individual relations. The Dravidian kinship of South India inspired theories of kinship by the structural-functionalist school of British social anthropology. First, Morgan (1871) distinguished the terminology as a "classificatory" system of Dravidian kinship from the "descriptive" systems of Aryan and Semitic kinship and proposed that the structure of kinship terminologies reflects crucial features of the family and marital arrangements (see Busby 1997a, 25; Uberoi 1997, 13). Rivers' (1906) ethnography of the Toda people demonstrated his "genealogical method", i.e., a mode of eliciting, recording and cross-checking the relations of kinship and marriage of all members of small community through which he wanted to provide a firmer frame for the comparative understanding of social institutions (Uberoi 1997, 18-19). Later authors constructed detailed formal classifications (Lowie 1928; Murdock 1949) and linked descriptions and theories of the logic of the system (e.g. Dumont 1953; Rivers 1907; Yalman 1962; Trautman 1981; and more recently Trawick 1996; Busby 1997a; 1997b; Ram 1992).

Lévi-Strauss, who dedicated *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949, eng. 1969) to Morgan, treated the existence of social rules determining who was legitimately marriageable as fundamental to human culture – the system of marriage rules should be considered as an ideal, unconscious, collective mental representation. Lévi-Strauss was concerned with the logic of culture. Importantly, he emphasised the principle of exchange as a form of marriage. His insistence on examining the structural significance of ties of marriage and alliance meant a move from descent to alliance and reoriented the study of kinship and of marriage in particular. Nevertheless, the feminist approach to the study of kinship has pointed out the political implications of his insight on the "exchange of women"[5] (see Rubin 1975). Also his notions of exchange and reciprocity have been criticised (see Raheja 1988; Goody 1990), and for example, Weiner (1976; 1992) has demonstrated exchange as a way to effect social

[5] Lévi-Srauss (1969) pointed out that the rules of exogamy – and prohibiting "incest" – exist for the sake of creating social solidarity among groups. "A rule of reciprocity" requires men to exchange in marriage "that most precious category of goods, women"(ibid., 51, 61).

control and deal with the paradoxes central to social life in all societies (Peletz 1995, 351).

Dumont (1957; 1983), in turn dedicated his important paper on South Indian kinship to Lévi-Strauss. As Busby (1997a, 25) points out, despite critiques over the years, Dumont's theory is still the most widely accepted theory of Dravidian kinship. There have been very few other attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of the terminology, and no-one has yet been able to replace his approach with an alternative that has been even remotely as successful at meaningfully uniting terminology and social structure (ibid.).

According to Dumont (1957; 1983), the logic of the Dravidian kinship system focuses on the marriage relation the system entails: terminology is based on alliance rather than descent. As encapsulated by Busby (1997a, 25), this terminology separates the father and the father's brothers as a class separate from the mother's brothers, and these classes are linked by an affinal relation. For Dumont (1983, 93, 103) the fundamental feature of this system is the passing on of the alliance relation, the fact of the alliance having equal value to, or being more important than, that of descent. Accordingly, analysis of kinship leads us to emphasise marriage as an institution of emphasise "the highest importance" on both levels of caste and kinship – it constitutes their articulation in a sense. "This is quite in accordance with the obvious and well-known stress that Indian society lays upon it", as Dumont (1983, 103-104) stated.

The anthropologies above were looking for systems, rules and structures based on the study of kinship through descent rules, terminology systems and marriage prescriptions or preferences. Marriage is also a basis of this study. However, my focus is on the broken marriage and the divorced and separated women – that they have always existed alongside with the patterns and rules – makes it evident that static, highly abstract formulations and models of "official" rules and principles of social structure do not take us far enough toward understanding social actors or the myriad contexts in which they organize themselves, relate to one another and use resources, or create order and meaning in their lives (see also Peletz 1995, 352). As Carsten (2004, 16) points out, the studies of kin classification became a highly technical and specialised area, quite divorced from the messier realities of social and political processes as well as the everyday experience of kinship. Furthermore, to my mind, these accounts presented social and cultural structures, such as kinship structures

as rules, laws or models that person were *ought* to follow without paying enough attention to the ways the structures *enable* person's actions and agency.

These approaches were later (in the 1960s and 1970s) challenged from several directions. For example, by Bourdieu's [1977] (1992) view that to understand actors and context we need to devote greater attention to behavioural strategies: to the practical logic of everyday action as well as to the objective structures within which such action takes place by the means of the concept of habitus – the interplay of structure and practices in the conduct of everyday life. I will also pay attention to everyday practices and the interplay between the actor and structure.

Schneider's (1972) challenge was particularly influential. Schneider emphasised that while studying kinship one must take the natives' own categories and follow their definitions and their symbolic and meaningful divisions, wherever they may lead (Schneider 1972, 50-51). Moreover, the cultural level should be treated as a distinct level of analysis that is linked to, but not reducible to, the social system or social organizational level (Schneider 1972, 56). As Carsten (2004, 18-19) points out, Schneider occupies a pivotal role in the reformulation of kinship studies because his work straddled two traditions in the anthropology of kinship: one, which focused on the structure and functions of social groups and the other, which examined the meaning of kinship in a particular culture. To Schneider, the generation of cultural meaning was the central problem, rather that the functioning of social groups or the comparative analysis of kinship terminologies (ibid.).

The central theme of Schneider (1968; 1984) was the relationship between nature and culture, or between the biological and social aspects of kinship. In his account of the American kinship system as a cultural system, as a system of symbols, Schneider (1968, 18, 29) made a distinction between the "order of nature", and the "order of law", i.e., between substance and code: the categories of relatives in American kinship are built out of two elements, relationship as *natural substance* and relationship as *code for conduct.* Each of these elements derives from or is a special instance of the two major orders which American culture posits the world to be made up of, *the order of nature* and *the order of law* (Schneider 1968, 29). Later Schneider (1972; 1984) pointed out that the primacy of ties derived from sexual procreation of Euro-American folk

assumptions does not necessarily apply cross culturally but have distorted kinship theories.[6]

Importantly regarding this study, Schneider's (1964; 1972; 1984; 1980) cultural analysis of kinship provided a tool for understanding interrelationships between kinship and other domains: kinship is not considered as a discrete isolable domain of meaning but rather that the meanings attributed to the relations and actions of kin are drawn from a range of cultural domains, including religion, nationality, ethnicity, social class and, gender and the concept of person (Collier & Yanagisako 1987a; 1987b see also Strathern 1981; Yanagisako 1978; Yanagisako 1985). Actually, the concept of person in India can be studied as the process of a continuation of classic themes of anthropology, such as kinship, but it also allows new perspectives for local meanings. There also lies the importance of Schneider's work to this study – it has greatly influenced the study of personhood in India.

Fluid Persons and Self-Representations

The shift exemplified in Schneider's work was a part of larger move in anthropology from function to meaning, in which the work of Geertz was influential, particularly regarding the study of persons and personhood. According to Geertz (1993, 59), instead of attempting to place the framework of western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe and a distinctive whole into the experience of others, "understanding them demands setting that conception aside and seeking their experience within the framework of their own idea what selfhood is."

The rise of symbolic anthropology focused attention on symbolic aspects of the person. As such it became highly influential regarding the study of personhood in India. It carried on the discussion about the concept of person introduced by Dumont (1980) that was leaning towards legal history and philosophy and that was based on his study of caste in India. In *Homo Hierarhicus*, inspired by Mauss (e.g. 1985 [1938]), the notion of the person in India was subsumed to the hierarchical ordering of caste groups to which each person belongs – "holism" and "collective

[6] Provocatively, Schneider (1972, 50) claims that "Morgan and his followers" earlier use of "kinship" as an analytical category is "a theoretical notion in the mind of anthropologist which has no discernible cultural referent in fact."

idea of man". This notion of person was contrasted with the individual moral persons founded on "fundamental social principles" of equality in the West. Dumont's work stimulated the interpretative studies of Östör, Fruzzetti and Barnett et al. (1992a) on culturally constructed concepts of personhood in different cultures in India. They related cultural categories and social behaviour and action to ideas about the person in Indian society and sought to analyse them systematically (Maybury-Lewis 1992, viii). Thus, they took Schneider's insistence that there is no such a thing as kinship theory as a distinct from cultural theory as their point of departure (ibid.).

The ethnosociological model of Indian transactions proposed by Marriott and Inden (1977) and others in the 1970s explicitly followed the logic of Schneider's analyses and utilized the same terms. In contrast to Schneider's dual categories of nature and law or substance and code, Indian thinking displayed "systematic monism" – code and substance were inseparable "code-substance" or "substance-code", as suggested by Marriott (1976, 109-100). Accordingly, conduct alters substance, and persons engage in the transfer of bodily substance-codes through parentage, through marriage, and through services and other kinds of interpersonal contacts (ibid., 111). All interpersonal transactions involve the transfer of the moral and spiritual qualities of those involved. As encapsulated by Marriott (1976, 111) "dividual persons, who must exchange in such ways, are therefore always composites of the substance-codes that they take in." This view of the person is indicated in two ways: firstly, the person is a relatively fluid and malleable entity (Marriott and Inden 1977, 233 in Busby 2000, 20) and, related to this, that the person is substantially connected to others, and not therefore a stable bounded individual but rather a "dividual" – constantly giving out and receiving parts of the self from others (Marriott 1976, 111-112).

Following this logic, Daniel (1984) emphasises that among Tamils, all things consist of fluid substances. In perpetual flux, these substances have an inherent capacity to separate and mix with other substances (ibid., 3). Thus, it is possible, and inevitable, for persons to establish intersubstantial relationships with other people (sexual partners, household and village members) and with the places (land, villages, house) in and with whom they live. Such substantial mixings point to what Daniel has called "the cultural reality of the nonindividual person" (Daniel 1984, 9). Moreover, Trawick (1996, 252) who studied kinship in the village of

Tamil Nadu, spoke about the "interpersonality" among human beings there: considered alone, a man has no meaning.

The ethnosociological approach has been criticised on a number of counts, for example, for its tendency towards over-systematization (see e.g. Good 1991, 179-82) or its disregard of different versions of indigenous notions of personhood produced by ethnographic material (see e.g. Barnett 1976; McGilvray 1982) which suggest that dualism is not completely absent from Indian thought and "on philosophical, epistemological and ethnographical grounds" by Östör and Fruzzetti (1992, xiii-xx). Moreover, some context-specific but definitive theories of procreation based on enthnosociological analyses (Barnett 1976; David 1973) have left no room for the distortions, contradictions and variations in ideas and beliefs that are invariably present even within the same group, as Busby (2000, 86) points out.

For Busby (2000, 20) the notion of a "fluid person" is one which is difficult to reconcile with the rather rigid caste identities of South Asia (see also Parry 1989; 1994, 114) while notions of persons as 'dividuals' clearly exist alongside other clear notions of individual and boundedness (see McHugh 1989; Mines 1994; Parish 1994). Later Daniel (1984) and Osella (1993) have meaningfully modified the concept of the fluid person, pointing out that there appears to be a notion of a fixed identity at the core of the person which can be altered only with difficulty, while more peripheral, surface traits or characteristic are vulnerable to outside influences, as stated by Busby (2000, 20-21). According to Busby (ibid. 21) gender appears to be a fixed attribute, although both substance and process, or performance, are important to it.

Moreover, with regard to this study, a problem lies in the degree of difference proposed in ethnosociological models between Indian and "Western" categories. This is also my main criticism of Dumont's (1980) opposition of man as society: "collective being" in India versus man as an individual in "West" (ibid., 232-228). Sharp contrasts and dichotomizing views in the notion of the person between Indians (South-Asians) and Euro-Americans may be misleading and tend to oversimplify both the "Indian" and "Euro-American" versions of the person. Instead, I agree with those researchers who argue that a strong focus on relationality in India does not mean that no notion or experience of individuality or individual autonomy exists (Säävälä 2001, 103-104; Lamb 1997, 282; 2000, 40; McHugh 1989; Mines 1994; Parish 1994: 127-129, 186-187;

more generally, Ortner 1995; Ewing 1990; 1991). Accordingly, Euro-American notions of the person also express other values than individuality which have their prominent expression in many legal, medical, philosophical and religious discourses (see Carsten 2004, 97; Spiro 1993; Simpson 1998; Lamb 2000, 40; Säävälä 2001, 103).[7]

Generally, as Ewing (1990, 257) states a single model of self or person is not adequate for describing how selves are experienced or represented in any culture. In this regard, looking at a person's self-representations is useful. Ewing (1990, 255) stresses that since anthropologists are concerned with symbols or "collective representations", the culturally shaped "self", or person as I would say, as the object of anthropological study can most clearly be understood in this sense, in that of self-representation. The self-representations may be both explicit and conscious or implicit and outside of conscious awareness (ibid.). According to Ewing (1990, 273-274) self-representations are embedded in a particular frame of reference, are culturally shaped and highly contextual. As long as an individual is able to maintain contextually appropriate self-representations in interaction with others she or he may experience a sense of continuity despite the existence of multiple, unintegrated or partially integrated self-representations and looking at the contents of that experience of wholeness is the object of the anthropological quest (ibid., 273-4).

Despite the criticism above, the interpretation of fluid persons and the idea of constructing persons through interaction and sharing substances place emphasis on the transformability and flexibility of a person's self-construction. As such, it opens up a stimulating viewpoint regarding marital breakdown which mixes up the woman's bonds of interaction and sharing and her make-up as a person within hierarchical gender and kinship relations. Moreover, I consider it useful to study a person's multiple self-representations and the construction of a person of multiple bonds in tandem because together they show the processes that people go through while they are creating and acting out different self-representations through interaction in order to re-construct their "relational" personhood after the marital breakdown.

[7] As Ouroussoff (1993) stated the anthropological assumption about Western individualism is derived from a tradition of philosophic liberalism rather that from an ethnography of Western people's actually lived experiences in a specific context (see also Carsten 2004, 96-108). Similarly Simpson (1998, 64-72) asks, based on the ethnography of changing families in Britain, whether the western context of thinking of persons in relational terms is necessarily that different from Melanesian notions (Strathern 1988).

Furthermore, I seek to discuss the relevance of the concepts such as a "relational personhood" or a "fluid person" beyond Hinduism in South India. As Dumont (1980, 201-216) states "in the Indian environment" there is something of caste despite the modification in their ideas or values among non-Hindus as well. Moreover, Busby (2000, 3) notes that a local form of Catholicism in the Mukkuvar fishing community in Tamil Nadu shares much with local Hinduism in terms of its ideas about power, personhood; and substance and exchange. Thus, my attempt to look at how each of the divorced and separated women of different religions and different socio-cultural backgrounds re-construct each their "relational" personhood after the marital breakdown, leads us to learn about the broadness and limits of the concept of "relational person" in the South Indian environment. Through them I will also seek to address the following question: Is there such a thing as a South Indian marital breakdown?

The Substance of Relational Persons; Social Transformability

Anthropologists working in India as well as in Papua New Guinea have adopted the term "substance" as a way of understanding kinship in more processual terms, looking at how persons are constituted through their relations with others (Carsten 2004, 109). As noted by Carsten (ibid., 133), the fruitfulness of "substance" as an analytical term has been partly as a means to express transformability. Actually, when the concept of substance was transferred to the Indian context the whole concept showed its malleability. Thus, in the Indian context "substance" means the properties that are felt to be transferred among people, something that is treated as material, although it is not necessarily visible (Lamb 2000, 34-35). Sharing substances through interpersonal transactions (e.g. sex, sharing food or water, gift exchange, living together) forge real bonds of relation, attachment and affection among persons who share something fundamental (see e.g. Lamb 2000, 34 in Bengal). Consequently, in the Indian context the mutability, fluidity and transformability of "substance" that underlies a contrasting set of notions about the person, and the relations between persons, e.g. caste system as differentially valued and ranked cultural units (Daniel 1984, 2-3) is in contrast to the original use of substance made by Schneider, who had argued that blood or natural substance was unalterable and indissoluble in the context of American kinship (Carsten 2004, 120).

Moreover, while studying relations and the "relational" persons of India, it is wise to have a brief look into Melanesia where people are also considered to be "relational". Like Wagner (1977), Strathern (1988) is also concerned with flows of substance between people, and with the reproductive capacity of substance: the relationship between form and substance is crucial to Strathern's argument (Carsten 2004, 122-123). Moreover, guided by Busby (1997b, 273) we are to note the important divergences between the Melanesian and South Indian cases: between the focus on *relationships* and the focus on *persons.* Melanesians are concerned with "the capabilities of relations" and their bodies are a *"microcosm of relations*" (Strathern 1988, 131) placing emphasis on the flow of relations (ibid. 206, 371,) whereas for South Indians persons engage with others and are connected to them through flows of substance which they exchange with each other. Such substances, however, refer to the persons from whom they originated: they are a manifestation of *persons* rather than of the *relationships* (like in Melanesia) which they create (Busby 1997b, 273).

Thus, South Indian (or South Asian) people are considered as "permeable persons": the boundary of the body is considered permeable, so that substance can flow between persons, and connections can be made (see e.g. Busby 1997a; 1997b; 2000; Daniel 1984; Marriott & Inden 1977; Osella 1993). This internally whole person with fluid and permeable body boundaries in South Asia is compared with an internally divided and "partible person" in Melanesia. For Busby (1997b, 274-276), gender is key to the understanding of difference: In South India gender is fixed, categorical, firmly attached to the bodies and persons of women and men whereas in Melanesia gender is performatively and contextually defined and a property of relations rather than persons. This example shows the ultimate interconnection between the study of the person and the study of gender and, also, kinship (see also Busby 1997a; 2000; Collier & Yanagisako 1987a; 1987b; Rubin 1975; Carsten 2004, 81; Lamb 2000; Peletz 1995; Howell & Melhuus 1992; Ortner & Whitehead 1981; Strathern 1988). The in-depth studying of one of them only reveals its important links to the others. Consequently, this study also gains inspiration from feminist anthropology. However, I consider and study gender mainly as a significant cultural construction that is an essential but integrated part of the larger symbolic system. Consequently, the relationship between the genders – the cultural categories of male and female – is fundamental but interrelated to other social and cultural relations because it gains its

importance through them. Thus, my main goal in this study focuses on the transformability of culture and of gendered persons in South-India. As such I hope to contribute relevant knowledge to the feminist anthropology and feminist research as well.

The interconnection between person, gender and kinship becomes visible while studying processes of constructing and reconstructing persons through marital breakdown in India. Marital breakdown impacts on kin relations and discloses the existing gender relations and power structure through its consequences. I suggest that a moment of crisis, like a marital breakdown, makes the transformability of relational personhood – as well as the transformability of relational society and culture – visible. It shows how inventiveness; creativity is truly a classic hallmark of culture, as suggested by Siikala & Siikala (2005, 18). Marital breakdown challenges the hierarchy as a system of relations and forces both micro and macro systems of substance, i.e., both persons and societies, to be reconstructed in a new way through new forms of transactions. By exploring marital breakdown and by looking at the process of the re-construction of a woman's self-representations, relational personhood and relational society because of it, leads us to understand more general aspects about the potency of transformations in persons, in culture and in society – which is the aim of this study.

If the relational persons of South India are made up of intimate emotional and substantial connections with other people, places and things i.e., particularly their homes, and if these connections make up what a person is, what then happens when these connections and the bonds of intimate interaction break down? What does it tell us about the construction of gendered persons and about the processes of kinship within the cultural-historical setting of both South India and also more generally? Furthermore, I am interested in women's agency in order to manoeuvre their substance or fluid personhood through interaction and transactions – an area that has thus far not been given sufficient attention. How are the actors able to use the cultural and social structures of their society, including legislation, in order to improve their position through interaction?

The Law as a Process

As with kinship, personhood and gender, an anthropological understanding of the law needs to be connected to other domains of symbolic power

and to the wider system of social relations. Laws regulate marriage and divorce and so they are essential for our understanding of the consequences of marital breakdown for the women as persons and members of their hierarchical, pluralistic society.

There are remarkable studies done in order to valorise and to critically analyse the historical development of the Indian legal system, including family law, under the colonial and post colonial period (e.g. Chandra 1998; Cohn 1989; Desai 1990; Galanter 1989; Agnes 1999; Derrett 1999), the development of its main principles (e.g. Derrett 1978), its weaknesses, contradictions and needs for reform in general (e.g. Larson 2001; Larson 2001 (ed.) and in particular from the feminist perspective (e.g. Vatuk 2001; Basu 2001; Agnes 1999; Dhanda & Parashar 1999 (ed.); Dhanda & Parashar 1999; Kapur & Cossman 1996; Parashar 1992; Mukhopadhyay 1998; Sharma 1994, 348-378; Jaising 1996; Ray & Basu 1999). These studies illuminate several contradictions embedded in the Indian legal system which I will review here very briefly in order to give historical contextualisation for my focus on the consequences of them for the everyday lives of divorced and separated women in Bangalore.

As Galanter (1989, 15) argues, one of the most outstanding achievements of British rule in India was the formation of a unified nationwide modern legal system. In undertaking to administer the law in the government's courts stuffed with government servants, the British took a decisive step toward a modern legal system, initiating a process that Galanter calls the 'expropriation of law', which made the power to find, declare and apply the law a monopoly of government (ibid., 15). As E. Moore (1998, 38) describes, the British colonial government introduced a central, unified legal system in which the family, clan and caste status were replaced by an ideology of equality for the individual before the law. This idea was gradually adopted in the Indian Constitution.

However, there is a conflict between the equality principle of the Constitution and the Hindu principles of *dharma*[8] , i.e. duty or law, as highlighted by Derrett and O'Flaherty (1978, ix). In India hierarchy and duty are inseparable. Hierarchy lends authority to various sorts of duty, by no means chiefly internal obligation, personal 'conscience' (Derrett 1978, 18).

[8] The Sanskrit scholar Gonda names *dharma* as "untranslatable" pointing out that it is merely "glossed" in bilingual dictionaries by means of ten or twelve lines of English terms or phrases: 'law, usage, customary observance, duty, morality, religious merit, good, works etc.' These do not do the justice to all aspects of the concept and its inexhaustible wealth (see also Geertz 1983, 197; Mees 1980; Derrett and O'Flaherty 1978, xiv-xv).

Similarly, *dharma* is the code of justice most appropriate to each group of society. As Geertz (1983, 196-198) points out, as far as the law is concerned, this notion is most critical. What distinguishes the Indic[9] "legal sensibility" from others is that rights and obligations are seen relative to one's position in the social order, and position in the social order is transcendentally defined (ibid.). As Cohn (1968, 155) put it, basic to British law is the idea of the equality of the individual before the law whereas Indian society operates on the reverse value hypothesis: men are not born equal and they have widely differing inherent worth. This theme or value is basic to the whole social structure and is expressed most clearly in the caste system (ibid.).

Secondly, there is a conflict between equality principle of the Constitution (including sex-equality, Articles 14 and 15) and the content of the personal laws (see e.g. Parashar 1992; Mukhopadhyay 1998). In India family relations are governed by religious personal laws.[10] The four major religious communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi) each have their own religious laws concerning marriage, divorce, succession, adoption, guardianship, and maintenance.[11] In the laws of all these communities women have less rights than men in corresponding situations (see e.g.

[9] Geertz's (1983, 195) use the term "Indic" is his attempt to finesse the whole, highly vexed question of the degree, type, depth or whatever of "Indian-ness" in Southeast-Asia.

[10] The term "personal law" is derived from the ancient distinction between territorial and personal laws. Personal laws attached to an individual at birth and applied to the person wherever he or she went. The division between personal and other spheres of law was first introduced in India by the English administrators who, early on, decided to leave the personal laws of the native undisturbed, because they formed a part of the religion of the natives (Parashar 1992, 46).

[11] Hindus, Buddhist, Jains and Sikhs follow The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 and The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 (Diwan 1998, 2-9; Jaising (ed.) 2001, xxxix, xl). Parsis follow the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936. At the time of my field work, Christians followed The Indian Divorce Act, 1869 but the law has since changed, after the Indian Divorce (Amendment) Bill (2001) (Deshpande 2001).The couples, who have a civil marriage or who have registered their religious marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 follow that law (Jaising 2001). In addition, customary laws of different communities still play an important role regulating marriages (Jaising 2001). Most of Muslim Personal Law is uncodified, thus, there is no comprehensive marriage and divorce act of acts for Muslims (e.g. Parashar 1992, 160; Ahmad 2003). However, Muslim women can seek divorce by court based on The Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939 (ibid.).

Parashar 1992, 18; Mukhopadhyay 1998, 6-11).[12] Hindu personal law has been extensively reformed to an equal direction, however, this process has later been strongly criticized by various scholars (e.g. E. Moore 1998; Cohn 1989; Mukhopadhyay 1998; Cossman & Kapur 1996; Kishwar 1994; Dhavan 1989; Galanter 1989; Agnes 1999, Derrett 1999).

As pointed out by Cohn (1989) and E. Moore (1998) British scholars of the classics, in consultation with Indian experts, complied and translated ancient Hindu and Muslim texts in order to find family laws. For example, E. Moore (1998, 39) argues, the overriding belief in the superiority of British laws overshadowed the entire process: there were mistranslations; translations accompanied by the distrust of Indian scholars' own interpretations; and misplaced emphasis on certain textual authorities over others (see also e.g. Mukhopadhyay 1998, 11-27; Agnes 1999, 58-67).[13]All in all, the question of the codification of and reforming of Hindu law was debated for nearly a century. In fact, divorce was the thorniest question (Desai 1990, 608).[14] The fundamental changes brought about by the two principal enactments *the Hindu Marriage Act 1955*, and the *Hindu Succession Act, 1956*, were more equal succession rule, monogamy and permission of judicial separation, nullity of marriage and divorce under the Act (Desai 1990, 64-65). Despite the reforms, it has been discussed whether the codification of Hindu law really improved the position of Hindu women. According to Kapur and Cossman (1990, 55-57), it significantly improved the *legal status* of Hindu women, but the enforcement of law was, and still is, a far more complicated question.

[12] Since Hindu Law reform, Hindu women and men have had equal laws concerning marriage, divorce and maintenance, but inheritance, adoption and guardianship legislation still favour men. Other personal laws have various unequal provisions. For example, Islamic Law permits polygamy and unilateral, extra-judicial *talaqs*-divorce only for men and The Indian Divorce Act, 1869 of Christian Law, which was still in force during my fieldwork had different and unequal grounds for men and women for obtain divorce (Parashar 1992, 288-292). The Indian Divorce (Amendment) Bill 2001, changed this (Deshpande 2001).

[13] Cohn (1989, 134) describes how Warren Hasting, a commercial and diplomatic agent for the East India Company, was trying to help the British define what was 'Indian' and to create a system of rule that would be congruent with what were thought to be indigenous institutions. Yet, this system of rule was to be run by Englishmen and had to take into account British ideas of justice and proper forms of deference and demeanour that should mark the relations between rulers and ruled (ibid.).

[14] Reforming Hindu personal law was delayed until 1955 when four separate pieces of legislation, the *Hindu Marriage Act 1955*, the *Hindu Succession Act*, the *Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act* and the *Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act*, were finally enacted (e.g. Kapur & Cossman 1996, 55-57).

Kishwar (1994), on the other hand, has critically questioned the idea of improvement on Hindu women's position in India (meaning *all* Hindu women, among all castes and all regions in India) because of the Hindu Code reform (see also Agnes 1995).

Even today, the state has not adopted a consistent policy with regard to the reform of personal laws. Since the time of independence, a Uniform Civil Code has been the demand of the Indian women's movement.[15] From time to time this debate has raised strong communal and religious tensions that show how the reforms of religious personal laws are bound by consideration of the political stability of the state (e.g. Singh 1993; Agnes 1999, 192-202; Gandhi and Shah 1993, 252-257; Mukhopadhyay 1998, 189-224). The argument that the minority communities need special consideration conquers the state's proclaimed adherence to the principles of Constitution, such as sex-equality (see Parashar 1992, 144; Agnes 1999). The consequential conflict embedded in the Indian legal system is legal pluralism (e.g. Austin 2001; Larson 2001). According to E. Moore (1998, 93) the diverse legal forums express relations of unequal power and the competing ideologies of religion, the state, and the dominant caste. Overlapping dispute-processing systems can be manipulated against each other which challenges the jurisdiction of each (ibid.).

Due to the above conflicts and contradictions, the legal campaigns of the Indian women's movement have met with mixed results. On one hand, many of the political campaigns have been successful, in so far as the state has responded by enacting new legislation and reforms on a broad range of criminal and civil laws.[16] On the other hand, the legislative enactments have often fallen short of the demands of the movement, and underforcement of the law and the inaccessibility of the legal system to the majority of Indian women have been serious problems. Moreover, formally equal laws can continue to produce substantially unequal results (Kapur & Cossman 1996, 66, 20). Kapur and Cossman (1996) suggest that the familial ideology that constructs the family as the basic and sacred unit in society, and women's roles as wives and mothers as natural

[15] The Indian women's movement is not homogenous and certainly does not speak with one voice. However, certain tendencies and common goals can be found throughout its history. Social reformers in the nineteenth century, women in the independence movement and activist in the contemporary women's movement, have all fought for women's rights and law reforms, as noted by Kapur and Cossman (1996; see also Forbes 1999).

[16] See more in Chapters 4 and 5.

and immutable appears throughout the law as self-evident and beyond question. The biggest debate about the law reform of any religion as well as of Uniform Civil Code has always risen when the "family issues" were discussed and the border between the public and private domain has been challenged. However, although the law reinforces relations of subordination, at the same time, it provides an important instrument of liberation. As Comaroff (1994, ix) points out, the law is "Janus-faced" – it is both a tool of domination and resistance to that domination – and, accordingly, it also produces paradoxes and contradictions.[17]

I agree with S.F. Moore (1978, 244) who states that the law must always be studied as a complex double image, as both directing and reflecting social organisation. Further, we also need to go beyond the classical task of legal anthropology - to understand the relationship between law and society[18] - to examine law simultaneously from a long term historical perspective and from the perspective of individual-centred, short-term, choice-making, instrumental action and interaction in order to understand more about the way in which legal institutions, rules, and ideas function as part of the framework within which ongoing social life is carried on and how the processes of social life affect that framework (ibid., 255-256). Thus, law may be seen as dialectical process (see S.F. Moore 1978, 244) as well as an ideology - as a set of symbols subject to interpretation and manipulation (see E. Moore 1998, 36). In order to understand pluralistic law and society in the terms of an active process of the continuous making and reiteration of social and symbolic order, this study is aims to address the following questions: how do such processes and counter processes operate together, what are the preconditions for reproduction or transformation and what is a role of agents, such as divorced and separated women, in these processes? From this perspective the dynamic and contradictory nature of law can be analysed in a public context as well as in a private one.

[17] For a general discussion see e.g. Kapur and Cossman (1996); Starr and Collier (1989); Lazarus-Black and Hirsch (1994) and for ethnographic examples in India see e.g. Vatuk (2006); Basu (2001); Moore (1998); Maunuksela-Aura (2003); Aura (2007). See more in Chapter 5.

[18] Earlier, anthropologists interested in the law followed Malinowski (1926) to understand how social control was maintained through the interconnectedness of social institutions, or they followed Radcliffe-Brown (1933) in studying disputes to discover rules (i.e. "laws") whose supposed enforcement by third parties was credited with maintaining order in particular societies (Starr and Collier 1989, 4).

Furthermore, as S.F. Moore (1978, 2-3) points out, ordinary experience indicates that law and legal institutions can only effect a limited degree of intentional control of society: social reality is a peculiar mix of action congruent with rules and other action that is choice-making, discretionary, manipulative, sometimes inconsistent and sometimes conflictual. Thus the inherent nature of legal systems is that they can never become fully coherent, consistent wholes which successfully regulate all of social life (ibid.). According to Dhavan (1989, xxxiv), we know very little about the Indian context of how lawyers bargain, negotiate settle, or process a case or the manner in which the case is adjudicated, not to mention the role of complainants, as I would add. Dhavan (ibid.) argues that nobody knows who uses the Indian legal system and why: there is virtually no research in this area. I want to fill this gap and to look at the law as a resource that divorced and separated women use while they are negotiating their positions and living conditions after the marital breakdown. Thus, I will attempt to reveal both the potency of the law as well the potency of the women's agency.

Contextualising Fieldwork Process

Going into the Field

My field, Bangalore, is the capital of the state called Karnataka. It has recently (on 1.11.2006) been renamed to its Kannada name, Bengalūru.[19] South Indian states, i.e. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala have their own cultural traditions and languages, such as Kannada spoken mainly by Kannadigas (38% of the population of Bangalore), but they all belong to the family of Dravidian languages and they are connected by kinship practices and historical background. At the moment, the population of Bangalore is more than six million and it is one of the fastest growing cities in India (e.g. Madon 1997). In Bangalore the percentage of Hindus (79.2) and Muslims (13.3) are similar to the percentages in India as a whole (80.5 of Hindus, 13.4 of Muslims) but the percentage of Christians (5.7) is higher than the average in India (2.3). In the past

[19] See BBC news, South Asia (1.11.2006). The statistics of this section, see Census of India, 2001; see also http://www.karnataka.gov.in/ (20.9.2007); http://www.bangaloreit.in/html/aboutbng/bangporfile.htm (20.9.2007); http://www.karnataka.com/ (20.9.2007).

decades, Bangalore has been transforming from a *"Pensioner's Paradise"* into the *"Silicon Valley of India"* as it accounts for 35 percent of India's software exports. It is the nest of India's growing computer software industry: it keeps on attracting multinational IT companies (e.g. Infosys, Wipro Technologies, Motorola, Oracle, Compaq, Nexus etc.). It is also home to prestigious colleges and research institutions. The city has the second-highest literacy rate (83.9 % compared to the average literacy rate of 64.8 %) among the metropolitan cities in the nation (after Mumbai). Bangalore has attracted industry and commerce as well as numerous immigrants, particularly from the neighbouring states. This all has led to the typical problems of overpopulated cities: air pollution, insufficient infrastructure, traffic congestion, slummification along with social problems and crime. Yet, Bangalore is regarded as one of the most progressive and liberal cities in India. In the heart of city, the surroundings of MG Road, people walk around in fashionable clothing, pop in to glamorous boutiques, fashion shops, supermarkets, fast food joints and browsing centres, or relax in theme pubs, Internet cafes, and cinemas. It is not rare to see people in western clothes or young women drinking beer in a pub. However, this is in contrast to many other parts of Bangalore as well as the rest of the state with 66 percent of its population of about 45 million living in rural areas producing coffee, ragi and silk.

My anthropological fieldwork in Bangalore was guided in turns by me and in turns by my informants. All started in 1995 while I was working as a teacher within a volunteer work program called ICYE for a half a year in a small town call Tumkur, 70 kilometers out of Bangalore. I placed a notice in the Indian English-language magazine "Women's Era" which is mostly ready by urban middle-class women. The notice said that I sought information on Indian women's personal views on arranged marriage for my master's thesis. To my surprise, I received letters from divorced and separated women. Thus, the study which had started in order to learn about the "ordinary" marriage system in India led me to discover exceptions of the system. Thus, marital breakdown and divorced and separated women became the focus of my study.

Therefore I returned to India for 4-month fieldwork in 1996. While studying and analysing the life situation of 15 middle and upper class divorced or separated Hindu women for my master's thesis (Maunuksela 1998), I was baffled by the constant statement that divorce and separation among the poorer women is less problematic for them: divorce is

not so shameful for the poor because of its commonality, the women of working classes "fight back" at their husbands and work anyway so they are financially more self-sufficient than middle class housewives. Also some scholars echoed these evaluations (e.g. Brahme, 1991, 106; Srinivasan 1986 in Amato 1994, 214), some without any empirical evidence and without any question addressed to the poorer women themselves.[20] Similarly, I met with comments on the more frequent and thus less stigmatised divorce among Muslims resulting from the "easiness" of the Muslim men's unilateral, extra judicial but commonly practiced so called triple talaq -divorce. My uneasiness to swallow these comments aroused my further research curiosity which could not be appeased by the existing studies. The main aim of sociological (or socio psychological) studies and analyses on the subject of divorce in India (Mehta 1975; Choudhary 1988; Devi 1998; Hussain 1983; Krishnakumari 1987; Moinuddin 2000; Pothen 1987; Amato 1994; Rao and Sekhar 2002; Jaishankar 1997) had been statistics or "general" conclusions about the reasons and the results of divorces. This approach had failed to convey the complexity of the divorced and separated women's delicate life situation and the meaning of divorce and separation. The studies that were based on open-ended un-scheduled questionnaires (Mehrotra 2003; Dhagamwar 1987) or case-studies among Muslims (Dasgupta 2003; Bano 2003; Khan 2003) had provided richer accounts. Moreover, the anthropological studies on the impact of Muslim Personal Law on women in India had informed us of legal side of marital disputes and its consequences for the divorced and separated women's lives (Moore 1994; 1998; Vatuk 2001; 2003; 2005; 2006; Jeffery 2003).[21] However, the studies of divorce in India usually concentrated on one religion at a time but I wanted to examine women of different religious backgrounds as well as of different castes and social positions. I considered that the studies about "Indian" that prudently

[20] For example, Mukherjee (1994, 118-120) reasons that the higher percent of divorced/separated women among the rural population presented in the censuses of 1961 and 1971 is as follows: "It [divorce or separation] does not financially and socially affect the low-caste women to such an extent and employment opportunities for these rural women are higher. There are hardly any problems connected with the dissolution of marriages since most of these people have virtually no property."

[21] Recently, divorce among Muslims in India as well as Muslim women's use of the legal system in India have been important areas of research interest (Vatuk 2001; 2003; 2005; Moore 1998; 1994; Moinuddin 2000; 2003; Ahmed 2003 (ed.), Ahmed 2003; Jeffery 2003; Talib 2003; Bano 2003; Saheb 2003; Hussain 2003; Ganai 2003; Nishat 2003; Khan 2003; Rasheed 2003; Gangoli 2003; Durrany 2003; Waheed 2003).

exclude Muslims and Christians in order to avoid generalisations, may unintentionally lead to assumption that Hindus are "more" Indian than representative of other religious communities. Thus, I hoped to contest the consideration that the religion is a main determinator of one's social position, particularly in regard to the women's position – an idea that has been adopted by the Hindu and Muslim communal politics (e.g. Basu 1998; Hasan 1998; Jeffery 1998). Although religious personal laws further confirm this idea both in ideological and technical level, the studies on domestic violence (e.g. Vatuk 2006, 223; Busby 1999, 227-228; Flavia 1988; 1990; Jeffery 2000, 292) suggest that the women of different religions have alike family problems. Further I wanted to explore whether they have similar marital breakdowns as well and whether there is such a thing as a South Indian marital breakdown. Moreover, there was a gap in the ethnographic knowledge of the different, sometimes contradictory aspects of the everyday lives of divorced and separated women and particularly about the consequences of marital breakdown for the women homes, bonds and self-construction as relational persons – areas that this study aims to shed light on. Thus, I returned to India, at the end of 1999, to Bangalore for a one-year fieldwork study for this doctoral research.

The Unknown Divorce Rate

Other than a gap of ethnographic knowledge there is a gap of reliable statistical knowledge on divorce and separation in India. The population census is undertaken at ten year intervals of in India and then the marital status of persons is also recorded. According to the last census in 2001 the number of divorced/separated people was 3 331 925 which is 0.32 percent of the total population (1, 028, 610, 328) and the number of divorced/separated women was 0.47 percent and men 0.19 percent of the total population (Census of India 2001: Table C2 India). According to the censuses, the percentage of divorced persons has been relatively stable over last few decades: 0.32 in 1971, 0.33 in 1981 (Singh 1991, 63) and 0.32 in 2001 (Census of India 2001: Table C2 India). However, the percentage of divorced/separated women has increased in some measure from 0.39 in 1971 and 0.42 in 1981(Singh 1991, 61) to 0.47 in 2001(Census of India 2001: Table C2 India). It is worth noting that the census describes each person's contemporary status, and so, once divorced/separated but then remarried persons are counted as married

persons. Thus, the lower rate of divorced/separated men compared to women indicates that it is easier for men to remarry. Moreover, it makes the number of divorced/separated women a more significant marker of the development of the divorce rate. On the other hand, taboos and shame of marital failure and common tendency to hide one's divorce and separation from others affect the reliability of the figures shown by each census – some people may be more eager to hide their divorce than others and most probably the total number of divorced/separated persons is actually higher (see Maunuksela-Aura 1998; Aura 2006). In any event, the census of India 2001 challenges the popular belief about the generality of divorce/separation among Muslims and among lower castes. The percentage of the divorced/separated among Muslims was 0.33 (males 0.13 and females 0.54). Thus, it was not considerable bigger than the percentage of the divorced/separated among Hindus: 0.32 (males 0.19 and females 0.45) and it was less than the percentage of the divorced/separated among Christians: 0.52 (males 0.30 and females 0.74) (Census of India 2001, Table C3 India). In addition, the percentage of divorced and separated people among the scheduled castes (which is the lowest caste group of Hindus) was 0.35 percent and so only slightly higher than the percentage of divorced/separated people in the whole population, at 0.32 percent (Census of India 2001, Table C2SC India). There was less than one percent of divorced/separated people, among all groups, in the total population.

India has no system for the compulsory registration of divorce and the compulsory registration of marriages is only in its early stages: The Supreme Court of India ruled all marriages, irrespective of their religion, to be compulsorily registered recently, in February 2006 (Mahapatra 2006; Venkatesan 2006). Consequently, there are no *reliable* statistics that could give quantitative data on the development of the divorce rate. For example, according to Divorce rate-website (2007) the crude divorce rate in India is 1.1 per cent (11 marriages out of 1000 marriages end in divorce) in comparison to 0.74 per cent in 1990, whereas another website, Example Essays (2007), reports that the divorce rate in India twenty years ago was about 5 per cent but is today about 12.5 per cent, however, these reports indicate no source for their statistics. According to "a survey of divorce rates in different countries", divorce in India is now twice as high as ten years ago although "there are no formal statistics concerning divorce rates" (Women of China-website, 2006). Gautham

(2002) reported in the New Statesman that "according to the latest surveys, marriages are breaking up as never before: the official Indian divorce rate of only 8 percent overlooks that fact that in small towns and villages, the vast majority of married couples dissolve their marriages unofficially" (see also Rao 2002; Padmasini 2003 about the growing divorce rate). Despite my best efforts I never came across any official divorce rate.

The all-India figures for divorce I came across in surveys were 3.21 per cent in 1961 and this figure was based on a sample of 133775 marriages that had taken place in the last 50 years (Towards Equality 1974, 116, cited in Mukherjee 1994, 119) and 2.22 per cent in an international divorce study by Gohm et al. (1998). To give other examples, Batliwala et al (1998, 84-85) who studied the status of rural women in Karnataka noted that 1.5 per cent of them (a total of 1171) were separated and 0.4 percent of them were divorced in compared with to 0 per cent of divorced and separated men (out of 1103) and studies among Muslims came up with the figures such as 6.5 per cent of 812 households studied in Bijnor, town in Western Uttar Pradesh (Rafat 2003, 78), 6 per cent of key informant women of eighty-eight key informant couples in rural Bijnor (Jeffery 2003, 109) and 3.5 per cent of 600 subjects of study in Jammu and Kashmir (Ganai 2003, 294-5).

Reach for Bangalorian Divorce

All professionals – the judges, the lawyers, the family counsellor, the workers and activists of women's organisations – I came across during my fieldwork convinced me that divorce is becoming more common in Bangalore, particularly among the urban educated middle and upper class people. The same is declared in studies on divorce conducted in Bangalore (Krishnakumari 1987, 133-135) as well as in other cities of India (Pothen 1987, 19; Devi 1998, 16; Choudhary 1988, viii) although without statistical evidence, except Ghosh (1989, 89-90) who bases his argument on the increased number of divorce petitions filed in different cities in India. According to my own data, the number of matrimonial cases filed in the Family Court of Bangalore has increased steadily year by year since it was set up in 1987: from 653 cases in 1988 to 1392 cases in 1999 (see table 1.1 above). Most of the matrimonial cases deal with divorce or separation either directly based on a petition for divorce or separation or indirectly based on petitions for the restitution of conjugal rights, maintenance or custody. However, it is worth noting that the population of

Bangalore has also increased notably over the last few decades. According to the 2001 census of India, there was a decadeal increase in population of 17.25 percent from 1991 to 2001 in Karnataka.

Table 1.1: Number of matrimonial cases filed in the Family Courts of Bangalore 1987-1999.

1987: 1369
1988: 653
1989: 705
1990: 730
1991: 781
1992: 840
1993: 934
1994: 902
1995: 1120
1996: 1034
1997: 1080
1998: 1252
1999: 1392
2000: 1262 (31.9.)

Moreover, recent news describes how "divorce rates are soaring among India's newly affluent middle classes, as working women with independent incomes refuse to submit to the tradition ideal of marriage" and, particularly, in Bangalore the number of divorces has tripled between 1988 and 2002 (news.telegraph 2005). Indian Abroad News Service reported by the end of my fieldwork year that "Marriage a byte too much for the IT savvy" (Noronha 2000). According to the sensation-seeking article, statistics from Bangalore family court show that urban upwardly mobile software professionals file most of the cases for divorce and for the reasons that "can make you laugh or cry." Thus, public discourse – based on studies, news, opinions of professional, discussions with people – indicates that marital breakdown is becoming more common in Bangalore.

However, it was a major challenge to find divorced and separated women who were willing to tell me about their lives. My local guide, Dr Shanta Mohan of the Gender Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) gave me the invaluable contact information of people and

organisations that she believed to be useful. I also had my old contacts to begin with. However, it took two long months before I met my first new informant, and it took many written applications and formal and informal discussions before the doors of the Family Court and the women's organisations opened to me.[22]

Meanwhile, my husband and I, settled down smoothly in Bangalore in a nice middle class area called Indiranagar. Our one-bedroom residence was part of the two-floor building where our landlords, two other families and one "bachelor" were also living. Our landlords were traditional but open-minded *"South Indians"* who were interested in our life but did not interfere too much. Every religious Hindu festival day our landlady brought us feast food and the whole family loved to guide us on their cultural traditions and rituals. I also joined in spoken Kannada classes and kept on studying Kannada throughout the year unflinchingly, although the language mainly used during my fieldwork turned out to be English. My regular Kannada classes together with approximately twenty other learners, who had migrated to Bangalore from other states, were wonderful situations to learn about culture and everyday life of people in Bangalore – and to find informants with the help of my fellow students.

As a participant-observer, an ethnographer is both an element in the field of study and the instrument of its articulation (e.g. Bell 1998, 1; Ortner 1995, 175). As Ortner (1995, 174) put it, the ethnographic stance is as much an intellectual (and moral) positionality, a constructive and interpretive mode, as it is a bodily process in space and time. The anthropological fieldwork can be best described as a socially and historically specific process between the persons. Like mine, it aims to produce a "thick description" of *their* life by *me* as "author" (see Geertz 1973; 1988). It has a practical mission – like a dissertation – but simultaneously, it is an intense, deeply emotional experience of interaction that influences lives of everyone involved in it (see Kleinman & Copp 1993). According to Hannerz (1980, 106) all cities are multi-domain social structures: under urban conditions life take place on the multiplicity of separate stages and to different audiences (see Gluckman 1962). A chaotic city is very different from the "traditional" field, where you are all the time in your field. Yet, it is possible to participate in and to observe the everyday lives

[22] In all studies of marital breakdown in India researchers described the difficulties they faced while contacting informants because of the intimate and sensitive nature of the subject (see e.g. Pothen 1987, 18-19; Devi 1998, 34-35; Dhagamwar 1987, 7-9).

of informants in the classic, anthropological sense. However, it means that an anthropologist must be on the move to follow her/his "field". Additionally, she/he must create and maintain many fields: get access to them, maintain them through regular interaction and, also, to create or to find connections between the fields both in a very concrete manner (e.g transport from one field to another) and more conceptualised ways (e.g. how the women met in different fields defines their post-married positions). While being in my field, in Bangalore, I moved constantly from one place to another in order to be in my "proper field" as I considered that my proper field was being with divorced or separated women (e.g., in their homes, workplaces, neighbourhood or in the women's organisations), or being within any other situation (e.g. seminars or demonstrations) or place (e.g. the family court or the women's help centre) related to the subject of my study. Next I will describe my methods, my informants and the material I gathered for this study.

Methods and Material

Although I found it very difficult to find divorced and separated women who were willing to tell about their lives, they were very open once I got to know them. I carried out taped life history interviews with the women.[23] These interviews were made in English (26), in Kannada (19), in Hindi (4) and in Tamil (1) or by mixing the languages. Thanks to my Kannada lessons I could gradually manage with simple discussion and follow the more complicated conversation in Kannada. Ironically, when I had my first meeting with non-English speaking informants, I had carefully prepared to speak and to introduce myself and my study in Kannada. However, they did not understand me at all as they did not speak Kannada, but Urdu which is the mother tongue of many Muslims. Overall, the main languages spoken during my fieldwork were, first, English and, then, Kannada. The English language was spoken by most of the educated, middle and upper class women in Bangalore and thus logically our interviews and everyday interactions took place in English. However, Kannada was spoken by most of my non-English-speaking informants and certain Kannada terms for customs, rituals or relations were also in

[23] There are three exceptions: one life history interview was not recorded, one was interrupted and one woman was not separated or divorced at the time of the interview.

general use, and they appear in such manner in the text (and always in italics) throughout this work.

Luckily, I had an excellent research assistant, Vijayalaksmi, who could help me out with all the languages used during my fieldwork. I always had her with me as an interpreter when discussions or interviews were in other languages than English. She also interpreted customs, rituals and the codes of conduct. Although she was 26 years old and unmarried, she was an educated and experienced researcher. As our co-operation went on smoothly, she became indispensable. She also translated and transcribed most of my recorded tapes while I was with my English-speaking informants, particularly during the latter part of my fieldwork. Importantly, we also consoled each other, discussed and shared experiences related to the unbearable life miseries of the women we came across during the year. It helped me to move on with my study and gave me the strength to face women who felt that they had lost everything and who were hurt and helpless. Fortunately, we also witnessed how the women coped with their crises. The interviews were often thoroughly intensive and full of details. Especially those women who were still in the middle of their crises wanted to tell me each and every incident of their miserable marriages. Sometimes I was the first person who had the time and interest to listen to their stories. As I additionally wanted to hear all about their lives before the marriage and particularly after their marital breakdown, these interviews lasted for hours, usually around three hours. The longest interview lasted for seven hours. Furthermore, I recorded additional thematic interviews with some women in order to find out their views on certain aspects of the womanly life, such as marriages, family system, dowry and the position of women in India as well as on particular aspects of their own lives, such as their feelings towards their ex-husbands and their own definitions of their position as divorced or separated women. Finally, I conducted family history interviews with my key informants in order to find out how the life of the divorced or separated woman is related to her parents and grandparents' lives and to the larger whole of her family.

It is worth stating that, the life history interviews do not document the actual lives as lived: human mind selects, stresses and reorganizes the actual happenings of the lived life (see Tenhunen 1997, 22; Bertaux-Wiame 1981; Bertaux and Kohli 1984). Instead these interviews represent the *women's* perspective and their *subjective* stories that invite consid-

eration of the complex and contradictory perspectives on event, motives, relationships and expectations before and after the marital breakdown (see also Simpson 1998, 20). As marital breakdown is at the centre of these stories, the interviews provide the respondents with the opportunity to correct assumed or actual mis-representations by others and to develop "a self-representation that persuades the self and others that the teller is a good person" (Goffman 1969; Simpson 1998, 22). However, I do not analyse the life histories through the interpretive biographical method that focuses on the form of turning-points moments in the lives of individuals (e.g. Denzin, 1989). Rather, I use the life histories as well as other interviews as an inseparable part of the ethnographic method of participant observation used in this study, in the urban context of multiple fields. Thus, recording life history interviews as well as other interviews was a way to get invaluable information from the women's viewpoints and from their ways of building up self-representations – and also from the turning-points of their lives. However, that information gained its true value only when it was interconnected and analysed together with the information based on the participant observation. Equally importantly, conducting interviews was significant in the terms of the methodology: it was a means to legitimise my presence, to get access to the lives of my informants and a reason for us to visit each other. Interviews were a way to be together, to do something significant together – this study – to share something fundamental and, simultaneously, to learn to know each other, even to become intimate with each other, and to be part of each other's lives, and eventually, to become friends. After the long and profound life history interviews the women usually felt free to talk about their personal issues whenever we met. Thus we kept on having numerous discussions on diverse topics concerning their lives, dreams, views, fears and, of course, mine too. Gradually meetings with some informants led to other ways of being together where the line between fieldwork, free time and friendship became more blurred and which forms the heart of the anthropological study.

The main method of this study was thus participant observation, taking part in the daily life of my informants, in their homes, in the women's organisations and in the Family Court. Through participant observation, I examined the women's interaction, their homely routines and their encounters outside their homes: in their working places, in temples, in my home, in informal or formal meetings; while visiting temples, taking part

in weddings or in other social functions or religious rituals, when going to the movies, shopping, or having lunches and dinners together; taking part in demonstrations, in seminars or at an unique event such as the guest-evening of a self-improvement program or at a network marketing session. Furthermore, we cooked, watched television, visited neighbours, looked at photos, including wedding photos, together. All the discussions with the women and all interaction with their family members (i.e., their children, fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers), other relatives and friends were valuable sources of information.

Initially I met many of the divorced and separated women (29 out of 50) at women's organisations. I also kept on meeting some of them there throughout my fieldwork. I became most familiar with three different kinds of women's organisations (all remain anonymous) in Bangalore. The first organisation was dealing with the practical problems of the women seeking help. It also organised public demonstrations and seminars in order to raise awareness in the wider community and to pressure authorities to take action in specific cases of violence or injustice against women. The second organisation was a women's helpline which work in co-operation with the police. Women usually went there when in acute crisis. The third organisation mainly helped with low-income women to meet their basic needs and to improve their living conditions in slums by training and mobilizing them in various areas, from primary healthcare to organising a domestic worker's union. I also learnt to know some other women's organisations and groups in Bangalore, and met some of my informants through them. I visited and took part in several activities of the women's organisations, i.e., demonstrations, private and public meetings, lectures, sometimes together with my informants. I observed how the workers of the organisations helped women in practice and what kind of relationships existed between the different actors in women's organisations. I discussed with and interviewed the personnel of these three organisations about their perspective on "helping women" who were seeking help. For example, I recorded their perspectives on the cases of my divorcee informants, which were sometimes quite different from the points of the informants themselves.

Throughout the year, I also visited the Family Courts of Karnataka that deal with disputes relating to marriage and family affairs. The Family Courts are situated in the City Civil Court building in the heart of Bangalore. I observed how divorce and other matrimonial cases proceeded

in the Family Courts, how cases were performed in the courtrooms and what kinds of positions different persons (i.e. clients, lawyers, judges, family counsellors) took. I followed eight courts sessions and one counselling session. I also studied the court case files of 23 matrimonial cases (MC) 1987-1996, together with my research assistant, in the archives of the Family Court. Each case usually consisted of 50-200 pages of documents. In addition, I got photocopies of the court orders of nine MC cases chosen by the court clerk *"as interesting cases closed during this year."* The whole process of working with the files in the office of the Family Court as well as the applying for and receiving of the photocopies of orders taught me a lot about the court process and daily routines of the Family Court and about the hierarchy and bureaucracy embedded in them. I also had discussions related to the court proceedings with the clients (i.e. the divorced and separated women), the lawyers, the judges and the other personnel of the Family Courts. I participated in the conference for women lawyers and the meetings that dealt with legal provisions related to divorce and separation. In addition, I interviewed the judge, the lawyers and the family counsellor of the Family Court.

Taken together, my materials consist of detailed field notes of participant observation, i.e. more than 700 A4-pages of typed field diary, about 162 hours of recorded interviews and the forms and photocopies of the court cases as well as the secondary field material, such as local reports, studies, books and articles related to my study. Overall, this ethnographic study aims to inform one about marital breakdown through the divorced and separated women's lived-through lives and experiences, choices and social relations. "Triangulation" – the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon – accurately describes my approach. Although the main emphasis of analysis is on my field notes of participant observation among the women, combined with the life history interviews, all the other information from other sources – from the court records to the commentary of women's organisations – have enriched and validated the analysis. Consequently, I have observed this one phenomenon that of women and marital breakdown in South India – through many different methods (the participant observation, the interviews, the study of primary and secondary sources etc.) and from various sources and perspectives (the women themselves, their families, the friends, the neighbours, the personnel of the women's organisations and the family court, the court records) as described

above. The first ethnographic Chapters of the study (2, 3 and, partly, 4) which describe the past are based on the life history interviews more than the later Chapters (4 and 5) which describe both the past and present and combine both the material based on participant observation and interviews in different places, as well as the court documents in Chapter 5. The final Chapters (6, 7 and 8) describe the women's lives after the marital breakdown and the main emphasis is on the material based on participant observation. Overall, the ethnography - based on participant observations - forms the heart of my analysis, which was constantly enhanced with other materials.

During 1996 and 2000 I gradually found 50 informants altogether through the women's organisations and groups, with the help of the lawyers, friends, my local adviser, and by snowball sampling method (e.g. Atkinson and Flint 2001; Vogt 1999), i.e., the divorced and separated women themselves introduced me to new divorced and separated women. All this demanded the hard work of creating and keeping up networks with constant visits and calls. I was determined, yet, very cautious that each divorced and separated woman I interviewed really wanted to tell me her story by her own will. Similarly, I tried to be sensitive and not too pushy with my urge to maintain a contact with them.

The backgrounds of my informants vary a lot. They are from 25 to 63 years of age. The majority of them (33) are Hindus belonging to different castes and hierarchical positions, from the highest ranked Brahmins to the lowest Scheduled castes. I also got acquainted with ten Christian and seven Muslim women. The informants are from various strata of society. Although I met nine women from very poor households and a couple of wealthier women, most of my informants were more or less "middle class women." Although I initially wanted to carry on meeting with all my informants regularly and informally, it succeeded best with these middle and upper class women due to the personal and social circumstances. For example, talking in English and meeting without my research assistant led our relationship to the direction of friendship. I learnt to get to know these women and their lives best through the participant observation whereas I only met the poorer women while doing the interviews – the woman's organisation welcomed me to meet these women in its office in the city centre but did not allow me go to disturb their work in the slum areas of the city, where these poorer women lived. The middle and upper middle class women, who were often Hindus, form the core group of

this study whose experiences and perspectives are then enriched by and compared with by others' experiences and views.

I have divided the informants in four categories (poorer (9), lower middle class (5), middle class (19), upper middle class and upper class (17)) based on their family background and present standard of living as it was valorised by interviews and by observation. Most of the informants are originally from South-India, from Karnataka or its neighbouring states. Consequently, their mother tongues vary from Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and Telegu to English and the Urdu of Muslims. My informants are separated or divorced either from an arranged marriage (34) or a love marriage (14). Most of them are separated (29), i.e. they are living permanently in a different household to their husband but without being officially divorced. Some of them had obtained a divorce (17) or a separation (1) by court order and some (8) are currently undergoing the court process of obtaining a divorce (7) or judicial separation (1) and some (5) had divorced by an out-of-court divorce. In the forthcoming chapters I have always given the women's pseudonyms and a brief background description in a footnote.[24] However, when necessary I have also mixed names and other parts of information to ensure the anonymity of my informants. I have also enclosed the list of all informants in the appendix of this study.

The shortest marriage lasted only for three days and the longest for nearly thirty years. Some women have been divorced or separated for some months and others dozens of years ago. Some are in the middle of their crises while the others have already overcome their acute crises. Some women's ex-husbands have died after their divorce or separation. All this had an influence on what kind of information I got from the different women. Finally, some women I met only once, most of them many more times and eight of the women I have known for over twelve years, and even today I receive mail from them or other informants. These key-informants have given a valuable perspective of the changes in the women's life situations and their own perspectives over the course of time. Despite the fact that my informants are an extremely heterogeneous cluster, they share something fundamental because of them suffered

[24] Religion: **H**indu/**M**uslim/**C**hristian, age, **u**pper middle class/**m**iddle class/**l**ower middle class/**p**oorer, **s**eparated/**d**ivorced/**u**nofficially/**j**udicially in court (incomplete legal process marked with **-**)/ by **c**ustomary law out of court, number of children. For example, H, 47, u, s/u, 2 c means Hindu, 47 years, upper middle class, separated/unofficially, 2 children. See appendix for all informants.

marital breakdown; which means that it is relevant to study them as a group. Besides, only through all of them, is it possible to examine whether there is such a thing as a South Indian marital breakdown. However, my main interest is not to make quantitative generalisations based on my field material. Instead I will examine the similarities and the differences in the women's lives and strategies. I will then use my ethnographic material to examine how the divorced and separated women construct and reconstruct their homes, bonds and themselves through interaction in the urban context of South India. Simultaneously, I will bring these views to bear in the general theoretical discussions about persons, gender and agency, about kinship, about law and consequently about the interplay between the agents and the hierarchical socio-cultural structure.

Outline

The focus of this study moves from house to house along with the divorced and separated women. It also deals with the creating, cutting and recreating of bonds that are essential for constructing and re-constructing relational persons. It also looks at the flows of money that manifest these bonds. It continually examines tensions embedded in these processes because of marital breakdown. Chapter two starts with the women's natal homes, by looking at how the women's gendered, "relational" personhood is constructed there through interaction with family and kin. It also looks into the processes of seeking affinal bonding. Chapter three moves with the women into their affinal homes and examines how affinal bonds between persons and families are either created or fail to be created. It looks at difficulties of the women's personal transformation into wifehood because of the multiple conflicting or competing family bonds and examines the destruction of the marital bond and its immediate consequences for women. Chapter four follows how "homeless" women seek stability and justice – a home, money and social relations – after marital breakdown in order to overcome their crises and to move away from their transitory phase and addresses the question: How do their successes or failures influence their self-representations and their construction as "relational" persons? Chapter five explores how the divorced and separated women use the law as their contradictory resource for seeking justice, regulating and manifesting their social relatedness; and constructing their "relational" personhood. This study then looks into the divorced

and separated women's differently reconstructed post-affinal homes, the relations within them and their overall meaning for the women's self-representations and construction of personhood in the web of kinship. Each kind of reconstructed post-affinal home of the divorced and separated women illuminates the tensions of the kinship relations from a different angle. Chapter six explores the houses of the one third of women who are now living with their parents and siblings, usually in their natal home and looks at the bonds and tensions between siblings of different generations, i.e., the tensions of natal kin. Chapter seven looks at the houses of the other third of the women who are living together with their children, usually in their affinal home, and explores the bonds and tensions between the mother, child/children and ex-husband/father, i.e., the tensions of affinal kin. Chapter eight examines the houses of the last third of the women, those who are living alone and looks at the bonds and "relatedness" reaching out of the conventional web of kinship and working alongside it; and sometimes even replacing it – and the tensions of loneliness and missing kin. Chapter nine concludes the lessons learned by examining the issue of divorced and separated women and their marital breakdown in order to broaden our understanding of what it means to be a relational person within the kinship, caste and gender hierarchies in South India.

2. NATAL HOME: GROWING UP AS A "RELATIONAL" WOMAN

Learning Interdependency

Relational Persons

By examining the lives of separated or divorced women in South India, this study looks into the processes of constructing "relational persons" there, particularly relational gendered persons. In this regard, the Dumontian view of the relationship between the person and society has been very influential but it has also evoked differences of opinion. In Dumont's (1980) *Homo Hierarhicus*, the notion of the moral person in India is subsumed within the hierarchical ordering of caste groups to which each person belongs – and the "collective idea of man". Accordingly, in the Indian way of thinking, a person's self-construction is encompassed within a hierarchically ordered collectivity, i.e., "holism", and has no meaning as a decontextualised individual (ibid.) This approach has been named the "attributional model" as it emphasizes the fixity of inborn qualities and substances as well as the caste system as a hierarchy of interdependent categories that is based on relative degrees of purity and pollution (see e.g. Hancock 1999, 18). This model has been criticized from several different angles (e.g. Fruzzetti et al 1982; Ortner 1996, 144-147; Daniel 1984, 1-3; Mines 1988) and, for example, Dumont's idea of a single overarching principle – the opposition of pure and impure – has been interpreted to indicate a too stable and seamless, and thus historically limited cultural 'whole' (Raheja 1976, 80-82; see also Appadurai 1986; 1988).

Despite the differences of the "attributional" (Dumont 1980) and the "ethnosociologicals" model (Marriott & Inden, 1977; Marriott 1990;

1976; Daniel 1984), in both of them the "relational" person is a central concept although its meaning is understood differently. For Dumont (1980), relationality refers to the holistic and anti-individualistic nature of hierarchical personhood while for Marriott (1976) it refers to the transactional character of the person. No doubt, relationality and relations are central to Indian personhood (see also e.g. Trawick 1990, 252; Säävälä 2001, 102; Daniel 1984, 9; Busby 1997a). Indian personhood is seen to be a void without its social relations and connectedness – persons *are* what they are in social relations, as stated by Säävälä (2001, 102). Turning to the divorced and separated women's life history interviews, I will look at how these women described, from their perspectives, their growing into "relational" women and how they created their fundamental bonds in their natal homes through interaction and sharing with the important family members during their childhood. Furthermore, I will look at how the divorced and separated women described their "nature" – their birth qualities and their environmental qualities (Osella & Osella 2000) – whilst talking about their childhood and families. How do these life histories reflect the ideas of flexibility (the ethnosociological model) or stability (the attributional model) of a person's self-construction?

While talking about their childhood each of divorced and separated women's facial expressions relaxed and their voice became soft and affectionate or, in contrast, their eyes filled with tears. With some important exceptions, the middle and upper class women's childhood stories were usually about the beauty of childhood, in contrast to the poorer women's stories where poverty dominated their memories of an insecure childhood. The women's religious orientation – whether they were Hindus, Muslims or Christians – did not affect the issue of happiness. The women each narrated and analysed their childhood situations in order to reason, to interpret or to comment on their unhappy marriages or on current problems in their lives (see earlier, Chapter 1; Simpson 1998, 22; Goffman 1969): the women used expressions such as *"today I understand better"* or *"that was the reason for…"*. Through this narration and analysis, the women were also constructing the 'relational self' by presenting themselves and their lives in the context of family relations – as part of them or through the loss of them. They were also simultaneously building up their self-representations and explaining the processes that shape

them as persons or as "good persons"– an opportunity provided by each interview (ibid.).

The birth of a girl baby – the woman of my study – had usually been a welcome event in their families: some were the awaited first child or the first daughter to their parents. Those middle and upper class divorced and separated women with good childhood memories often started their recollections with nostalgic expressions such as *"My parents brought me up so fondly with great love and special attention"*. One woman sighed, *"I had a beautiful childhood but it went by very fast"*. While talking about their childhood memories most of the divorced and separated women used the plural expression 'we' instead of the singular 'I'. They referred to themselves as growing up with their sisters and brothers, or referred to their natal families, the people living in their natal home, their *"tavar-aumanee"*. Most of the women had siblings with whom they shared everything in their childhood. Some women were particularly close to their sisters: they slept in the same bed, shared secrets; and played and went to school together. In the beautiful childhood stories even the difficulties, such as short periods of poverty or the sickness of a mother or father, were interpreted as an important lesson and as events that bonded family members closer to each other. As Seymour (1999, 70-71) points out in her study of women, family and child care in the Bhubaneswar of India, the principle value that children must learn in their early years of life is that of *interdependence* – mutuality and the interpersonal responsibility of being a cooperative member of a collective family.

Owing to a common migratory background, most of the women grew up in a nuclear-type of family. However, some women's natal homes and houses could be considered more as 'houseflows' – as points of confluence (Trawick 1996, 87) – than households. The women remembered that their fathers' mothers, sisters or brothers, or other relatives had lived with them; the latter temporarily while they were, for example, searching for a job and permanent accommodation; or the family had kept on moving due to their father's work. Moreover, some women mentioned that they were brought up together with their relatives living nearby – their mothers' sisters, fathers' brothers, their cousins or with their grandfather's brother's grandchildren etc. Furthermore, a few women had lived most of their childhoods in the care of their mother's or father's mother along with their mother's or father's sisters and brothers and their children, i.e., the women's cousins; or in the care of their mother's elder sister

because their own mother had died or she was in a poor health, or too young or too busy with the younger siblings. One became a favourite of her grandmother, another become more attached to her mother's sister than to her mother but a third felt neglected, particularly among her more gregarious or attractive cousins throughout her childhood. Sharing children among women is a common practice in South India: according to Trawick (1996, 155-157) this private and informal exchange is as important as marital exchange in establishing bonds of love among kinwomen. With one exception, the women in my study were all fostered by their matrilateral relatives.

Throughout childhood, the women's relational personhood was constructed through transactions within family and kin and by "learning interdependence" in order to become dependent on each other in the hierarchical family and gender system. Thus, the divorced and separated women each grew up to be a link in a wide range of horizontal as well as vertical relationships within the natal family and among their relatives. Now I will turn to analyse the women's bonds to their fathers and, then to their mothers as those bonds – and the loss of them – particularly influenced each woman's further bonding and self-construction as a relational person. A mother and a father represent matrilateral and patrilateral families, thus, through the transactions with them, a woman also creates bonds with the larger family as a whole, becoming a "relational" member of it. Thus, I will look at how the women's bonds to their fathers as well as to their mothers were created and maintained through intimate interaction and sharing – through everyday transactions – throughout childhood, in the natal home. I will look at what kinds of problems, contradictions and difficulties the women faced in relation to the fundamental bonds created – or lost – in their natal families and homes and how they effected the women's self-representations and the construction of the self; and also how the flow of money was the directed both in the natal home and from the natal home in order to create or loosen the bonds connecting the women to their natal homes.

Cultivating the Daughter-Parents Bonds

"*I kept up with all their – what should I say? – expectations. I lived up to all that. They brought me up in such a way,"* was how Shanti Devi[25] en-

[25] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.

capsulated the principles of her upbringing and relationship with her parents. Actually, the bond between father and daughter has attracted scarce ethnographic attention although the father's significant role at the threshold of marriage is recognized (e.g. Trawick 1996, 150; Fruzzetti 1982, 17). Moreover, the women inherit their caste and lineage membership from their fathers. However, particularly the middle and upper class divorced and separated women's bonds to their fathers were manifested and mediated through education: the fathers chose the schools – sometimes *"beyond their [financial] capacity"* – paid the fees and also decided whether the woman had studied enough – which depended on the father's *"broadmindedness"* and the degree of academic success the daughters had. Some fathers helped the women with their school work – these were rare moments of direct interaction. The women for their part studied and took their schooling seriously. The educated women talked first about their schooling and, for example, the celebrating of festivals or the visiting of relatives were talked about only when I asked specially. "*I grew up in a house where everyone was highly educated",* one woman began her life story. A better education was identified with a better quality of life and security and thus each woman considered their education as their fathers' investment in their future. Presumably, each woman's education also intended to increase her prospects of receiving good marriage proposals, although the women themselves did not emphasise this aspect.[26] On the other hand, the low-income fathers were *"not in a position to send us [the woman and her siblings] to school"*, and the father's death, negligence, alcoholism or passion for gambling directly affected the woman's schooling even in more well-to-do families. In some of these cases, the mother stepped into the father' place – the women proudly told how their mothers sold their jewellery so that the children could complete their education. However, the death of the mother also stopped some women's schooling because they were then compelled to take charge of the household chores.

The women's bonds to their fathers were also manifested by their *"good upbringing"* and by the lessons of life or values that they learned from their fathers, such as "*help others"* and *"work hard"* – but also by a

[26] According to Agarwal (2000, 43), although women's educational and job opportunities have expanded, particularly in the cities of India, many parents still send their girls school to improve their marriage prospect with well-educated, well-employed men, than to improve their job prospects. As a matter of fact, I suggest, these goals do not exclude each other but serve for same purposes.

few upper middle class fathers[27] -- be *"independent.* These fathers taught their daughters to prefer science to *"blind beliefs"*. The fathers also regulated the women's movements outside the home after the women's maturity (see later). With the exception of those few women who were their father's *"favourite child"* or who could share everything with the father, the divorced and separated women described their fathers as strict persons who were working most of the times and whose presence at home changed its cosy atmosphere into a more strict one.

The women contrasted their fathers' strictness to their mother closeness and unquestioned love and affection. A mother's love for her child is considered the strongest of all loves and the most highly valued (Trawick 1996; see also Säävälä 2001, 112; Srinivas 1999, 141; Dhuruvarajan 1989, 96-97). South Indian ethnographies and kinship studies describe the particularly strong bond and the deep and intimate relationship between a mother and daughter (Srinivas 1999, 142; Trawick 1996, 163-170; Kapadia 1995, 31; Säävälä 2001, 155-156; Busby's 1997a, 36-37), some also emphasise the importance of mother's side of the family, the matrilateral kin, for the woman (e.g. Kapadia 1995; Trawick 1996, 120,125). Dravidian kinship analysis of Busby (1997a, 36-37), stimulated by her study of Mukkuvar community in Tamil Nadu, suggests that gender itself is a substantial attribute: a woman passes on her femaleness to her daughter via the blood of the womb and through her breast milk while a man passes his maleness to his son via the distilled blood of the semen. The radical difference between the male and female substance illuminate their metonymic sense of relatedness (ibid.).[28]

The mothers were usually always present and were the main characters of the natal home or *"tavarumanee"* in Kannada; "*my mother's house"* is the English expression. The women's bonds to their mothers were maintained and strengthened through daily sharing and close interaction

[27] These fathers had Hindu, Christian or Jain religious backgrounds.

[28] According to Busby (1997b, 38-39) the substantial links between the mothers and daughters, fathers and sons are has also been noted by Daniel (1984, 174) and Trawick (1990, 158, 163). Moreover, the ideas of gender and relatedness make sense of the symmetry and essential bilaterality of Dravidian system (Trautmann 1981; Yalman 1962) – parallel cousins, like siblings, share both male and female substance while cross cousins share neither. This is in accordance with the strong focus in the region on the importance of substantial links (Barnett 1976; Daniel 1984; David 1973) and the impossibility of uniting with those who share too much (Barnett 1976; David 1973; Kapadia 1995) (ibid.).

at home. With the exception of the poorer women, whose mothers also had to work; most of the mothers of the divorced and separated women were housewives. Additionally, some mothers were doing social work or *"helping"* in the family business. According to women, their mothers were, much like their fathers, hard workers. They were doing housework, particularly cooking and feeding, with only a little assistance. Even the eldest daughters, who often had taken care of the younger siblings, emphasised that their mothers were the unquestioned hostesses of their home. *"She loved us too much"* the women would often explain why their mothers did not even want the children's help. Besides, the children's work was to study (see also Caplan 1985, 71). Some women celebrated religious festivals only if their schoolwork allowed them, for example, never during the exams. However, when the women celebrated religious festivals they did it together with their mothers, sisters and brothers. The mothers prepared sweets that they all ate or gave to neighbours or made new dresses for the children throughout the nights, as the women recollected nostalgically. As Hancock (1999, 3-4) has noted, during a festival time, such as Navārattiri in South India, the women and children of the household act as both hosts and guests in each other's homes, worshipping the goddesses, and the homes are periodically transformed into the meeting halls of the neighbourhood.

The women's bonds to their mothers grew stronger if the mother and the father were having problems – the children would strongly empathise with their mothers, thus, forming a close but silent union of mutual support. According to the women, their mothers had never questioned their fathers or his decisions. Some women observed problems caused by their fathers' misbehaviour such as drinking, gambling or extra-marital relationships while others remembered how their mothers were criticised by the father or in-laws. Some women compared their own later marital problems with those of their own mothers and concluded that their mothers had had to put up even more than they ever did. One woman, Lalithamma,[29] recollected how her father had returned home after a two-month absence and her mother had fallen, crying, to his feet, given him bath and lit the lamps, crying and praising the gods. *"She had behaved as if she, instead of my father, had made a mistake…Even today I think about that. She had no courage to lead a life without a husband, unlike today's women."* Some women emphasised their mothers total dependency on

[29] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.

their husbands – the mother *"had no own identity"* or she was *"a simple woman"* under the control of her husband.

If the women's bonds to their mothers had been broken or violated during their childhood, the women considered it as a great misery that helped explain their future unhappiness, in addition to the women's *"own mistakes".*[30] Tarak,[31] narrated how her mother never loved them – she, her five sisters and three brothers. There was no relationship of love and affection,[32] *"we never touched our mother…we did not talk to her much. The mother-child relationship was missing. Everyone, all our relatives knew it. Today when I think about it, I feel very bad. I feel why had god punished us by giving us such parents."* A couple of the poorer women started their life histories by talking about the problems their mothers had and about the family tragedies that affected their lives. Kalawati's[33] mother had lost her own mother when she was only three years old and then Kalawati's mother was left for another woman. All this was repeated to Kalawati whenever she asked for something from her mother and since she was nine years old she, together with her sisters and brothers, had taken care of the sick mother who eventually committed suicide. Another woman's, Kusum[34]'s parents had entered into a love marriage. This had estranged them from the father's upper caste family and forced them to live in under hard conditions. Of their seven children, only three survived until adulthood and later Kusum's mother died of *"bleeding",* when Kusum was 10 years old. Kusum was then living with her father and in hostels but regularly visited, supported and invited to their home by her mother's elder sister who was like "*mother to me".* Another woman whose mother had died when she was young was taken care of by their mother's younger sister (see earlier, Chapter 2) but she felt unloved and unwanted till the day she ended their relationship. A middle class

[30] According to Dhuruvarajan (1989, 96-97) who studied on life of Hindu women in a village of Karnataka, mother's love is so precious that it cannot be replaced by anything else. There is none as unlucky as a child without a mother. Many women who had lost their own mothers while they were still young told the researcher with the great sadness how their life would have been different if only the mothers were alive – only mothers worried about a daughter and tried her best to make sure that she is married to a good husband and into a good family (ibid.).

[31] H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c.

[32] This kind of mother relationship is extremely rare in India. I have never witnessed such.

[33] H/C, ~45, p, s/u + w, 6c.

[34] H, 38, p, s/u, 3c.

woman Raja,[35] whose father had already died when she was a two-year-old, described her feelings after her mother's death more than twenty years later, *"I felt so bad. I thought that I had no one in the world. I felt like committing suicide. …I became very depressed. I could not eat, could not sleep because she was the only person with whom I was very close."*

The women who had lost their mothers or their mother's love were searching for a substitute for their loss which had sometimes led them into bad marriages (see later). Trawick (1996, 163-168) suggests that in the relationship between mother and daughter, it is the daughter who fears more the loss of continuity. The women 'seek a mother' if they are separated from the mother through the death of the mother or through marriage (ibid., 165). According to her, 'seeking a mother' *(ammāvai tēdi)* is a formula in Tamil Nadu – all human souls on departure from their bodies seek their mother: in laments, the dead mother is "hiding" or "gone to a foreign land" and the daughters are left seeking (ibid., 165-166). At least, the divorced and separated women who had lost their mothers were 'seeking' for comfort of their late mothers. Some women described their visits to graveyards in their moments of despair at being in the hands of unloving relatives, stepmothers or later, husbands. In fact, these examples of losing a mother or mother's love emphasise the closeness of mothers and daughters through negation.

Overall, the divorced and separated women's bonds to their mothers were close and strengthened daily through the direct transactions of giving, receiving and sharing of material and immaterial substances by feeding and nurturing each other, celebrating festivals and spending time together, exchanging and sharing ideas and thoughts. In contrast, the women's bonds to their fathers usually remained more distant and they were strengthen through indirect or mediated transactions such as schooling, upbringing and the lessons of life. In fact the women's fathers' emphasis on education and upbringing stress the environmental qualities of person- making instead fixed birth qualities such as jati/caste or community affiliation that are nevertheless inherited from fathers. Moreover, the fathers worked hard and earned money on the behalf of the family but then the food – bought with money – was cooked and served by the mothers. According to ethnosociological approach people are believed to be fluid and open in their nature (Marriott 1976; Daniel 1984) and women are viewed to be even more open and more exposed to mixing

[35] C, 27, m, s/u, 0c.

(e.g. in Bengal, Lamb 2000, 185), thus, direct interaction and sharing – transactions of 'substances'– between the mothers and daughters forge strong bond between them. Moreover, gender, perhaps an inherited substance (see Busby 1997b) but, at least later a socially constructed and shared character further enforced further the bond between the mother and daughter. As Lamb (2000, 187) points out, the women's relative openness emphasised not only their receptivity but also their diffusion. Accordingly**,** although the father was in charge of the natal home or *tavarumanee* formally*,* the house lived along and changed its substance and nature through the mother's direct transactions of daily care – most likely therefore the house was usually referred to as the *"mother's"* house by the women. All in all, as the women's bonds to their mothers were close and direct, violating or breaking the bonds made the women directly 'seeking' a compensatory bond, whereas the loss of the father indirectly affected the educational opportunities and standard of life and also indirectly, a daughter's marriage arrangement.

In the following paragraphs, I will look at the meaning of the puberty and the puberty ceremony in making of woman. Puberty marks a woman's sexual readiness for marriage and the puberty ceremony marks and forms the important bonds related to women and their marriages. The transactions of puberty ceremony strengthen the woman's position as a part of the larger family system as well as her "relationality" through interdependency within it.

Constructing The Bride: The Puberty Ceremony

Anthropological literature documents the social significance of menarche as a girl's social transition into emergent womanhood and sexual majority (e.g. Ram 1992, 82-93; Dhuruvarajan 1989, 65-67; Kapadia 1996, 93-123; Good 1991, 7). According to Kapadia (1996, 93) a girl who does not menstruate does not reach "full" womanhood but continues to be perceived as "unfinished" and ungendered whereas the gendering of men as well as their sexual potency is considered automatic. Moreover, a girl's first menstruation marks the beginnings of a state of openness and, thus, her readiness for marriage, sexual relations, and childbirth (Lamb 2000, 185).[36] It illustrates the female generative power, feminine energy,

[36] Women's bodies are believed to be more open and exposed than men's and therefore also more vulnerable for pollution (in Bengal, Lamb 2000, 183-187).

i.e., *sakti* which is both sacred and dangerous and should be therefore controlled (e.g. Kapadia 1996, 104-105).

The puberty ceremony is a prevalent custom in South India.[37] Usually it includes seclusion for seven days, feeding special food by kinswomen, a ritual bath after the seclusion and finally a function where a girl is dressed in jewellery and in an expensive sari for the first time and given special gifts by kin (e.g. Ram 1991, 84). According to Ram's (1992, 84-85) study on Mukkuvar women in Tamil Nadu, puberty ceremony is highly auspicious and celebratory: maturation in a woman – her enhanced status and her potential availability in marriage – is a pleasurable and important event. However, it also marks the containment of female body which is replayed over and over in metaphors and social practices of cooling, binding and secluding female body (ibid., 85). After the puberty ceremony, the adult woman binds her hair in tightly coiled cone-shaped knot and transits her free containment of girlhood to the binding garment of womanhood, a sari – stress on binding hair and covering sexual parts of body can be interpreted as key points of transition to womanhood (Ram 1992, 85). The sari signifies the girl's new identity of a sexually mature woman (Kapadia 1996, 103).

The divorced and separated women who described the puberty ceremony as part of their childhood memories were usually Hindus. The puberty ceremony was also embraced by at least one middle class Muslim and one Catholic woman. However while talking about ceremony I will concentrate on the experiences of Hindus. The puberty ceremony marks and strengthens the important kin relations. The ritual role of mother's brother, "*maava"* in the Kannada language, or his replacement by a *"mother's cousin brother"* (i.e. mother's parallel cousin) was evident in the divorced and separated women's narrations about their puberty ceremony. The women recall how their *"maava"* built a hut for them and how they were places there to sit in seclusion and fed with *"nice food"* brought by their matrilateral relatives.[38] One woman showed me the sari and the make up set she had got from her *"maava"* as a gift. Kapadia's

[37] According to Ram (1991, 84) the very existence of menarche rituals has been highlighted as a conspicuous contrast to attitudes towards female puberty in northern India where puberty is not celebrated but hidden (see Wadley 1980).

[38] According to Kapadia in the ceremony of Mukkuvars the girl is fed special food by specified senior kinwomen – wives of the mother's brothers, whose sons are potential grooms for the girl, and girl's brother's wives, reflecting a concern further related to the kinship system (ibid., 85).

(1996, 102-103) analyses of a Non-Brahmin puberty ceremony in Tamil Nadu emphasises the greater importance of affines as opposed to lineage kin – it is a girl's affines and primarily the matrilateral kin – who protect and "engender" the new woman in which the mother's brother is the central person. The mother's brother's – who is also a potential groom – significant ceremonial role in the puberty ceremony and many anthropologists have noted the importance of his role. He is, for example, the first and foremost of a series of present-giving relatives (Dumont 1983, 86; Kapadia 1996, 103). According to Kapadia (1996, 103), his gifts symbolize beauty, honour, sexual attractiveness – and marriage. In fact, Good's (1991) study and interpretation of female puberty rites in South India suggest that puberty rites are not only an intrinsic part of a cycle of rites that end with marriage but they also take the form of a symbolic marriage (ibid., 109).[39]

In the puberty ceremony, after either nine or eleven days of seclusion, the parents of my Hindu informants organized a function for their daughters. Rituals were made and the women received presents by the relatives of both sides. The women were dressed in beautiful saris and jewellery, customarily borrowed from the relatives. Sometimes, only the closest relatives came to the function and if the mother's brother was not available, he was replaced by another male relative such the father's younger brother or the father's sister's husband, thus the matrilateral preference (see above) was not considered a necessity. Not all daughters had a function: the mothers of the poorest women gave their daughters a bath, applied yellow *turmeric* powder to them and gave them a new sari instead of the function they could not afford. On the other hand, some women said that they had no puberty ceremony because their liberal fathers were against it.[40]

[39] According to Good (ibid., 8), this symbolic marriage represents the central concern of the group about its caste purity and group status, and protection of a group against the status ambiguity and impurity which could result from the uncontrolled sexual activity of the part of, especially, its female members.

[40] Thus, change of the transition of maturity from responsibility of collective to responsibility of the individual has started to take place presumably due to the northern influence brought about by migration. Only one of 52 middle and upper class women studied by Puri (1999, 49) in Mumbai had had her first menstruation ritually announced. According to Puri (ibid.) the disjuncture between the socially marked, but individually experienced female body shapes these women's narratives of shock and trauma about menarche. However, Puri does not analyse whether a puberty ceremony has earlier been a custom in Mumbai.

It was notable that the women who described the puberty ceremony used passive in their expressions such as *"I was placed to sit"* and highlighted their own weakness when I asked about their feelings during the ceremony: "*We do not feel anything. They (elders) will mould us. They ask us not laugh loudly nor to talk loudly.*" Thus, the women presented themselves in relation to the other people – the elders, the parents – who would shape them and "form" them. Or as another woman put it; *"At that time I was too young to think about anything. I did not feel anything. I was very normal and silent."* Similarly, the third woman, Shanti Devi,[41] linked my question about her feelings on the menarche ceremony to her overall childhood memories:

> I did not have the capacity to think, so much I was protected. I was in a shell. *My parents used to think for me in a way.* So I was in a shell. At that time I never used to think, I never used to talk, I was just a child, I just used to play. That is how my childhood passed.

Accordingly, the women emphasised how *"innocent"* or *"over protected"* they were throughout their childhood and, on the other hand, how *"normal"* that was. They were dependent on their parents financially and otherwise and without their own *"identity"*. Actually these statements about their own un-developed personhood on the threshold of maturity are analogous to the ways that some women described their mothers who *"had no own identity"* or who were *"a simple woman"* under the control of their husbands. Thus, in these narratives, the divorced and separated women each differentiated their present self-representations – after marital breakdown – from their own earlier self-representations as well as from the representations of their mothers in order to emphasise their future self-development – into a person with 'identity' or agency, as I would suggest – that took place after their marriage and subsequent marital breakdown.

In a way, these statements highlighting the Hindu women's innocence and passivity are in contrast with the emphasis the women put on their education and sophistication as presented earlier. Together, they illustrate multiple and contradictory processes of creating self-representations and constructing a person. Furthermore, the conflicting statements illustrate that girls grow up with mixed signals about their future role, as Seymour

[41] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c (2 miscarriages).

(1999, 144) also points out: girls are nowadays kept at home far longer than girls of their mother's generation which means that they experience adolescence and early adulthood as daughters rather than as daughter-in-laws, wives and mothers. Remaining in their natal homes with their siblings means that they can develop long-term attachments to their brothers, sisters and parents as well as pursue higher education and meanwhile to also develop career aspirations. Seymour (ibid.) argues that due to this "prolonged daughterhood" they entered marriage as more mature, more educated, potentially more assertive and independent young women, therefore, meeting the patrifocal expectation of modesty, obedience and self-sacrifice in daughters-in-law and wives has becoming increasingly complicated (see also van Wessel 2001, 202-249).

All in all, the Hindu women's relational personhood became achieved in a puberty ceremony through the women's ritually established kin relations and through the women's "dependency" on other persons, particularly their parents. The women's potency being mouldable by elders or parents supports the idea of the flexibility and transformability of a person's self-construction. However, although the puberty ritual can be seen as a symbolic transformation from a girl to a woman, the divorced and separated women highlighted the fact that, although they reached their maturity, they were still innocent children and their radical transformation into the "real" womanhood was yet to take place later in their marriage.[42] Nevertheless, after puberty they were not supposed to talk or play with boys anymore. They spent their evenings inside doing homework, playing chess, helping mother and spending time with their siblings etc., thus, some became *"homely"* kind of persons to whom it became difficult to move outside the home to find a job and, later, to get married. Only the poorest women's marriages were arranged within a year after puberty – a year which they spent at home – whereas most of the middle and upper class women continued their studies and some entered the workplace after they had finished their degrees. Usually marriage took place within their twenties.

Mostly, the divorced and separated women presented their childhoods either in contrast or in continuum to their problematic future

[42] This may also be common among other South-Indian women. At least, Säävälä (2001, 156) estimates that the difficulties the many women of her study had in telling her something about their earlier days is partly an outcome of the enormous personality development that took place after marriage, as new and important relationships that defined the women's mature personhood emerged.

marriages and marital lives. Beauty of the childhood and richness of the natal home were contrasted with the loss of them after the marriage or with the loss of each women's present life as a divorced or separated woman – the homeless women each missed their *"beautiful house"* and the impoverished women missed the wealth of their natal homes. Now financially and otherwise more independent women emphasised their dependency on their parents during childhood. On the other hand, the women with sad childhood stories regarded the problems of their marital or present lives as originating from their childhood. Although some middle and upper class divorced and separated women emphasised their family's good position with strong and multiple bonding related to 'birth qualities' such as ethnicity, jati/caste and community affiliation (see Osella & Osella 2000), all the women stressed the importance of 'the environmental qualities'(ibid.) and 'habituation'(see Trawick 1996, 97). Simultaneously, they highlighted their 'innocence' as well as their parents' *"efforts beyond their capacity"* in order to prove them, the women and the parents, all not guilty of the forthcoming misery. Whilst doing this, the women were also creating a ground for their future self-representations as divorced and separated women by emphasising the environmental and behavioural factors embedded in their potency of fluidity and flexibility. Consequently, these accounts further support the ideas of flexibility in a person's self-construction, as suggested by the studies following ethnosociological ideas rather than the "attributional" model of Dumont (1980) that emphasises the fixity of identity and the principle of a hierarchy of interdependent categories and is based on relative degrees of purity and pollution as the central ordering principle of caste. Also the women who described their sad childhood memories stressed the importance of 'the environmental qualities' and 'habituation' (see Trawick 1996, 97) through negotiation. Their loss of a good living environment or the loss of important bonds made themselves – their personhood – vulnerable to future miseries. However, these accounts, particularly those of the poorest women, also support the fixity emphasised by the "attributional model": It is more difficult to challenge the hierarchy from the bottom of it.

Furthermore, the significance of the arranged marriage is emphasised both by attributional and ethnosociological approaches: it crystallises their views on relational persons and relationality. Dumont (1980, 109-110) stresses that marriage reproduces a hierarchy through endogamy and by liking domain of caste and kinship whereas Marriott (1976, 111,

114) emphasises marriage as a good example of the transactional and transformational culture of India, paying attention to transformations that the substance-codes undergo through ceremonial transactions such as marriage – which involve subtractions from and additions to their natures. In any case, marriage reinforces a person's "relationality" but in different ways. In the following paragraphs, I will examine through the help of the divorced and separated women's life histories, how the transformation of their fundamental bonds – both natal bonds and affinal bonds – began through marriage arrangements or through relationships leading to love marriages.

The divorced and separated women considered marriage as the final end to childhood. The women's marriages were either arranged close-kin or non-kin marriages or love marriages which each had different consequences for each woman's bonding and position in her marital family, among the overall kin and in relation to her natal family. The breakdown of the 35 divorced and separated women's marriages were: arranged marriages with non-kin (26), with close-kin (5), or with in some other way related persons (4). 15 women's marriages were love marriages and 2 were forced marriages.[43] The question of a dowry became a part of the marriage arrangements – its avoidance was one reason for close-kin marriages, it played a crucial role in non-kin marriage negotiations and it was not given in love marriages. In every case, it manifested the bond between the parents and daughter at the threshold of marriage.

Seeking Affinal Bonding

Arranging Marriages and Investing in a Dowry

Women whose marriages were arranged emphasised how they had neither the will nor the power to influence the arrangements. They wanted to leave the whole delicate matter to their much wiser and experienced parents or they were brought up to obey their fathers so it did not even come to mind to interfere in the issue. Others tried to postpone their marriages – they would have preferred an education or to remain living with their parents – or fruitlessly protested against the choice of their fathers but as they described they were all *"dependant on father, without my*

[43] Two of the 50 women had been married and divorced/separated twice therefore the total number of marriages mentioned here is 52.

own work or money", *"too young, only a child"* or *"without any boyfriend or other support"* they did not have the power to influence matters. Nevertheless, in a few cases among the upper middle class women, the woman could meet and talk to a prospective groom before they endorsed the choice of their parents.

The close-kin marriage preference – a cross cousin or an uncle-niece marriage – presents the ideal of the overall kinship ideology of southern India although it is not a statistically dominant character.[44] In general, close kin marriages strengthen existing bonds knitting families closer together (e.g. Karve 1997, 70-71). According to Dumont (1983, 103) alliance is "the fundamental principle of South Indian kinship" showing a remarkable balance between partilineal and affinal kin in South Indian kinship.[45] Kapadia (1996, 27) argues further that, at least among Non-Brahmin kinship in a village of Tamil Nadu, preference – not balance – is given to affines: although inheritance, caste identity and the family-deity affiliation is transmitted in the male descent line *(pankali),* the importance of, particularly, matrilateral kin is emphasised in everyday life – people turn to it for assistance and consider it more important and close (ibid.).[46]All in all, the ideal and practice of close-kin marriages, in addition to the common village endogamy, are considered to allow women more latitude within the family when compared to some northern parts of India (Karve 1997, 70-71). Moreover, close-kin mar-

[44] Trautman (1997: 280-281) has collected quantitative data from ethnographic literature to determine the effectiveness of the marriage rule in Dravidian communities. In the state of Karnataka the numbers of cross kin marriages were 5-31 per cent. Based on Mc Cormac's (1958) research in Bangalore, the figures are given as a fifth of the marriages being cross cousin marriages: seven percent with the mother's brother's daughter, five percent with the father's sister's daughter and ten percent with the sister's daughter. Beck's (1972, 253) tabulation of various ethnographic accounts of different regions of Tamil Nadu indicates that the percentage of cross marriages varies between 5-15 percent (cited in Ram 1992, 168). Higher percent of consanguineous marriages, i.e. 42.27, is presented in the study of the rural women in Karnataka which counted marriages with cross cousins, with mother's brother but also with other mother's and father's other "relatives" (Batliwala et al. 1998, 194).

[45] Dumont (2000 [1986], 4) found a "remarkable convergence between Lévi-Strauss (1969) theory of marriage alliance and the emphasis put by Tamil informants on analogous themes". According to Dumont (1983) the alliance principle questions the importance of decent lines and balances patrilineality – there is a balance of forces but the forces are not of the same nature (ibid., 93).

[46] Kapadia (1997, 29) justifies her point further on by introducing the concept of the blood-bond, central to the way in which many informants perceived relatedness: people have more of their mother's blood than their father's blood after growing ten months in their mother's womb.

riages are understood to render a woman's transformation that takes place in marriage as her mother-in-law is either her father's sister or her mother's mother, a close relative with whom the young bride has a pre-existing relationship (e.g. Säävälä 2001, 105; Ram 1991, 181; Kapadia 1995, 13-45).

Five divorced and separated women's marriages were arranged within close-kin: one woman was married to her mother's younger brother and the other four to their father's sister's sons. In addition, four other women were married to more distantly related people. The half of the women considered a close-kin marriage a good solution – they knew their husbands and their mothers-in-law since childhood and were affectionate with them. With one exception, no dowry was demanded.[47] This was, according to the discontented women, one of the main reasons for the whole arrangement. One woman's father had lost his big property and then died, thus, the late father's sister's proposal for her son was accepted due to a lack of dowry money although the son was only a mechanic whereas the woman had a degree and a white collar job. The second woman was ritually announced to be "*the wife born*" to her mother's youngest brother when she was an 11-day-old baby. Later the woman opposed the marriage as she would have preferred to marry an educated clerk in the city instead of this much elder, uneducated, village man and both she and her mother made it clear to the uncle. Nevertheless, the grandparents, and particularly the grandmother, were determined that this marriage would take place and the woman's father agreed to it as he wanted to save on the dowry money.

Generally, the close-kin marriages strengthen bonds between affines whereas non-kin marriages create bonds between two kin, however, many husbands of non-kin marriages were also found with the help of own kin or affines. The word about the potential match was passed to the people of ones' own community through different channels by the mother (through home surroundings and family networks) and by the father (through networks of work and community activities). The candidates

[47] According to Nishimura's (1994, 245) study among Nagarattars, the mercantile caste in Tamil Nadu, the general assumption that cross cousin marriages involve less dowry is not always correct. For example, Nagarattars' preference for cross-cousin marriage does not preclude the women from providing large dowries on marriage, much larger than for average south Indian women. On the other hand, a dowry is given to be under a woman's control and is regarded as a fund to protect her in times of need (Nishimura 1998, 198).

and their family backgrounds were enquired about both directly and indirectly and Hindu horoscopes were exchanged and analysed. Afterwards, some fathers speculated that they should have examined even more carefully the husband's character and, particularly, his family background instead of giving preference to his handsome appearance, good education, wealth or close location. Some women emphasised that they got plenty of good proposals because of their good family background, the wide social circle of reciprocal help created by their parents or because of their own beauty. On the other hand, the loss of a parent or other childhood tragedies such as serious ill damaged the marriage prospects, however, some parentless women succeeded in finding a husband with a help of an employer (a maid), a distant relative or a religious guardian.

All in all, marriage arrangements made the women's kinship network tangible – its views, care, skills, width and prosperity were there to be seen. Marriage arrangements established the women's relatedness as a member of her kin and as a daughter of her family. Under the rule of the "gift of the virgin", in which marriage becomes defined as a father's sacrifice of his daughter to the invisible world through which *dharma*, the invisible moral order of the universe, is being upheld (Trawick 1996, 150). According to Trawick (ibid.) what is also being upheld is the prestige of the father who gives his daughter away in such a marriage – in exchange for the wealth he expends in a dowry and in the elaborate marriage festivities, he receives in the word of Bourdieu (1992) a large pile of 'symbolic capital'. Similarly, as Fruzzetti (1982, 17) points out in her study of marriage in Bengali society, the greatest gift a man can bestow, the one from which he acquires the most merit, is the gift of his daughter in marriage.

Also a dowry manifests the woman's relatedness and relations as well as her position in a hierarchical kinship and gender system. Moreover, it is a major, material transaction that takes place in marriage or which may determine whether the marriage can take place at all. Dowry, as commonly understood in the South Asian context, conflates several different sorts of gifts and cash that are given by a bride's parents to a bride, a groom and a groom's family at the time of the marriage (Uberoi 1997b, 232). It causes a lot of difficulties to fulfil the increased demands for a dowry for the girl's parents in every social stratum in contemporary India. Rapidly the dowry has spread among people, cutting across not only caste but sect, religion, class and region (Srinivas 1998, 180). Over the years, anthro-

pologists have been speculating as to whether the primary focus of dowry lies in the enduring relationship of groups linked in marriage (Dumont 1966) and in the continuing relationship of a married woman to her natal kin (Nishimura 1994, in north Vatuk 1975), or whether is it a "premortem inheritance" as Tambiah (1973) and Goody (1973) have presented it – and whose views have been strongly disputed[48] (Raheja 1995, 20-26). Furthermore, anthropologists have also differentiated dowry or marriage gifts, whether they are freely given gifts or demanded (*dan* or *pon* gift in Bengal, see Tenhunen 2007; Fruzzetti 1982) and by whether they are either cash for the grooms' family, called "groom-price" by Srinivas (1984) and Caplan (1985, 47; Caplan L. 1997) – or gold jewellery as a woman's asset, called *stridhanam* by classical Hindu texts (Caplan 1985, 47; Caplan L. 1997, 357), or general household gifts and vessels for the woman (Beck 1972). Furthermore, dowry, particularly its 'groom-price' has also been interpreted as compensation for the economic dependence of the bride since after marriage both wife and children are the man's dependent (Srinivas 1984, 17; Beck 1972, 230) or as compensation for the groom's parents for their investment in sons education that will benefit the bride whose parents want to see her "well-settled" (Caplan 1985, 47). A dowry can also be given as a tactical measure to attain social mobility (see e.g. Säävälä 2001, 194-195; Osella & Osella 2000, 97). Therefore dowry has been also explained in terms of "hypergamy" where families seek to marry daughters to families of a higher status and also of "sanskritization"[49] where communities try to improve their caste status by adopting dowry practices (Basu 2005).

Furthermore, the giving of a dowry can be viewed from one more perspective, as a manifestation of the daughter-parents bond showing the *"love and affection"* of parents towards their daughters. In her study of a Tamil village, Trawick (1990, 108-109) notes that the hardship parents must undergo in order to scrape together a dowry for their daughter and marry her off well is often interpreted as an act of loving sacrifice done for the sake of the daughter. Both feelings of love and feelings of pride

[48] According to Raheja (1995, 25) Goody dramatically overstates the degree to which dowry gifts are given to the daughter. Similarly, Basu (2001, 110) points out, based on her study of women and inheritance, that dowry could stand as the equivalent of inheritance only in the thinnest symbolic sense (see e.g., Basu (1999, 62-77), Agarwal (1994, 133-52, 480-83), Oldenburg (2002, 21-31) for discussion of the dowry versus inheritance debate).

[49] About sanskritization see Srinivas (1998, 1-48).

are expressed through marriage expenditure (ibid.). In traditional Hindu law, the daughter's property *stridhanam* is called the gift of "affection" as the women's share is always fluid and can fluctuate at the will and wish of the donors, i.e. parents, close relatives etc., while the son's property has an ancestral origin and to inherit it is treated as a right (Nishimura 1998, 197). Based on her historical study in the Punjab, Oldenburg (2003, 3-4) argues that in precolonial India, the idea and practice of dowry was not a 'problem' but a support for women: a mark of their social status and a safety net. Imperial politics created a more 'masculine economy' and deepened the preference for sons. Thus, according to Oldenburg's (2003) statement, presentday dowry pathology owes it origin to the exclusion of women from property rights to land, as formed by the British: profound loss of women's economic power and social worth in the colonial period was a direct consequence of the radical creation of properly rights in land (ibid., 3).

In Indian feminist literary (e.g. Desai & Krishnaraj 1990, 255-257; Gandhi and Shah 1993, 52-6; Kumar 1998, 115-126; Kumari 1989a; 1989b) as well as in popular discourses among scholars, journalists, politicians, legislators and the police, the dowry is mainly interpreted as an "evil of society'" which refers to the dowry related harassment, violence and "dowry deaths" that threaten women in their marriage; explain female infanticide and is seen as to injury to a woman's position in general. As Oldenburg (2003, 3) points out, seldom has there been so strong a consensus on a social issue in India than about causal relationship between the custom of dowry and the prejudice and violence against women. Moreover, the Indian women's movement – a scattered but strong and plural movement – has campaigned against the dowry-system strongly over the years, achieved the prohibiting of the dowry by The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act (1984, 1986) but, however remains disappointed with the little success legal drives have met in practice. According to the Act, the giving and taking of a dowry "as a condition of marriage" is punishable by law whereas "voluntary gifts" are excluded – a combination of provisions which makes for toothless sanctions (Basu 2005). Today women's organisations have seen the dowry in the context of a broader gender subordination and the effect of capitalist processes: the focus has been on simultaneously protesting against the dowry system and strengthening claims for parental inheritance (Basu 2005; see also Oldenburg 2003, 225).

These contested definitions of the dowry as a women's right, gift, safety net, demand, payoff, and incentive to kill infants and brides makes the dowry simultaneously timeless and historically changeable, both desirable and contemptible, and a scourge to abolish (Oldenburg 2003, 21). Dowry – however defined – is an important part of transactions between the families involved in an arranged marriage – because it creates as well as manifests the bond between them. It starts the series of sharing between families and between persons of these families that may be interpreted to comprise sharing of substances – and gradually becoming more and more alike – as well. Nevertheless, these different definitions of dowry may facilitate our understanding of the changing nature of dowry within marriages and lives of the divorced and separated women – before and during the marriage as well as after the marital breakdown.

The divorced and separated women of arranged marriages remembered in detail what all were given to the husbands and their families when the marriages was fixed. The total value of dowry and gifts was greatly dependent on the financial status of the family and not, for example, on the religion.[50] The women's families gave either some amount of money or gold, household utensils such as furniture, e.g. a bed or an *almerah* (a kind of wardrobe), vessels and other kitchen utensils. The husband was given a wedding suit, a ring, a gold chain and, perhaps a watch, and the women themselves were given jewellery and in a couple of wealthier families a site by their families. The husbands' families gave the women e.g. wedding saris and, a golden, *tali* ornament and sometimes other jewellery, particularly among the wealthier Muslims. Further, in those marriages where, according to the women, no dowry was given, the women's families gave the husbands a wedding suit and a ring and the women jewellery, however, those gifts were considered as a part of the marriage expenses and not as a dowry.

Contradictory discourses about the definitions of and justifications for a dowry became evident through the divorced and separated women's narratives of dowry negotiations. First, many women emphasised

[50] Dowry is also common among Indian Muslims although in Islamic law women are supposed to get *mehr* (or *mahr*) i.e., bride money as part of the marriage contract: the groom must commit to transfer such a gift, in cash or in other valuables to his bride (Moinuddin 2000, 108; Vatuk 2008). This *mehr* is either 'prompt' or 'deferred' and in India almost always 'deferred' (Vatuk 2008; Moinuddin 2000, 112). 'Deferred' *mehr* is considered as security for a woman as it is supposed to be given to the woman if her husband divorces her, however, in practice this happens only rarely (Moinuddin 2000, 145; Vatuk 2008).

that the husband's family did not *"demand"* any dowry but they – the woman's family – gave *"what they wanted."* Yet, in some cases, the husband's side asked *"indirectly"* about dowry but there was not *"bargaining"* about it. These women wanted to emphasise that whatever was given was based on their side's, usually their father's, will, decision and generosity.[51] According to some fathers of the upper middle class women, the giving of a dowry was considered not only as the parents' duty towards their daughter but also as some kind of "transaction of love" that encompasses the idea of reciprocity. The parents gave a dowry from their heart as a sign of their love and affection towards their daughter and in return they expected their daughter to be the recipient of love and affection from her husband and in-laws in her affinal home. One father calculated to me their marriage expenses as between 200,000 and 300,000 rupees[52] worth of gold as the dowry and between 200,000 and 300,000 rupees for the wedding arrangements and commented, *"So much I love my daughter. I am the only earning person in this family. All this was beyond my capacity. All this I did for my daughter, so that she could lead a happy life."* Thus, the dowry was presented as a sign of parental love and a manifestation of the daughter-parent bond.

However, in contrast, some women told that there was some bargaining over the dowry. For example, one husband's family *"asked for a Rado watch (worth 30 000 rs)"* but got a Titan watch (worth 2000 rupees) instead and another husband asked for 20 000 rupees as a dowry but was given only 5000 rupees by the woman's father. Hemalatha[53] recollected how her husband agreed, via a marriage broker, to marry her in spite of her *"lameness"* if they would give him a site for constructing a house, a car and a rent of 5000 rupees every month. During negotiations the process was cancelled by both sides in turn: by the husband due to his unmet demands as Hemlatha's father agreed to give a site only in Hemalatha's and not in the husband's name and a monthly rent of 2000 rupees and by Hemalatha's father due to the husband's suspicious family background, greedy demands and low status as an uneducated driver. After they finally agreed to the marriage, Hemalatha's father bore all the

[51] This kind of reasoning and argument is probably emphasised due to the legislation that allows voluntary gifts but prohibits the giving and taking of dowry as a condition of marriage (see e.g. Basu 2005).

[52] This was approximately 4600 – 6900 US dollars with a rate as of 1.1.2000. One US Dollar was 43, 51 Indian Rupee, conversely, one Indian Rupee was 0.023 US Dollars.

[53] H, 30, u, d/j-, 0c.

marriage expenses, bought a car for the husband and the cloths for all of those relatives of the husband who had come to demand a dowry after the engagement ceremony. *"My father said [to them] that he is doing all these things not for their boy but for his daughter,"* Hemalatha recollected. Thus, again the dowry was presented as a sign of love but also in more commercialised way as a tool of negotiations or as compensation for the fault in a woman.[54]

A third type of contradictory description of the definition of and justification for a dowry, were these husbands and families that fraudulently maintained that they did not want any dowry. Sometimes these statements were presented with *"sentimental dialogues"* as a woman put it, such as, *"no dowry please, we are allergic to dowry!"* or *"let them live happily, gold is not important"*. The women and their families took a refusal of dowry as a noble gesture. *"We were thinking that they are very good"* one woman recalled and another woman said *"that was the only positive thing in my mind while saying yes to this marriage. They said they do not want one paise of dowry."* However, asking for no dowry turned out to be a strategy of some husbands' families in order to get marriage agreed on. Some calculated that that they would none-the-less get something whereas others returned with dowry demands once the marriage was settled. For example, the husband's family who had convinced the daughter's family that they *"are not dependent on taking a dowry"* suddenly wanted 100 000 rupees once a marriage hall was booked. Usually, dowry demands were made by the family, thus, the woman's side could still hope that at least "*the boy is good only his parents are demanding money"*. Furthermore, in some cases the husband's side's willingness to a no-dowry marriage signalled hidden family secrets e.g., related to husband's earlier or ongoing relationships or mental instability. All in all, in these cases both dowry – or the absence of dowry –demands turned out to be a deceitful tool of negotiations or as a hidden compensation for a fault on the husband's side. Moreover, new dowry demands manifested the husband's side's higher position for negotiation. Such demands instantaneously changed the nature of the dowry from the parent's freely given gift of love into a tool of pressure.

Finally, many of the poorest of the women told me that their father, if they had one, was *"not in a position to give any dowry"*. However, their

[54] On the issued of marriageable qualities, or the lack of them, see also Tenhunen (2007).

husbands adjusted to the situation, sometimes even against the will of their own family members who had demanded a dowry. As matter of fact, in nearly a third of the arranged marriages of the divorced and separated women no dowry – as defined by the women – was given. However, with a few exceptions, the women's side paid most of the marriage expenses or, alternatively, families of the poorest women collected money from their neighbours, employers, or via the mosque from *"rich Muslims."*

The divorced and separated women described how impossible it was to stop the chain of events when they started the process towards the marriage. Once the promise was made, "the bride was born" and the woman was associated with her future husband both in the women's and their families' own consideration as well as in the eyes of others. Once the sharing of substances between the persons and families had started in the form of intense marriage negotiations involving both families, followed by other interaction preceding the marriage, particularly meetings of the future couple and dowry transactions, it became harder and harder to stop it – particularly as women are considered to be more open and exposed to mixing and thus more vulnerable to contamination. Once the forthcoming marriage was planned or announced, the hierarchy embedded in gender relationships became noticeable. The women and their families considered their position as vulnerable. If the husbands and their families complicated the matter by wanting more dowry, some property or any change in the marriage arrangements, the women and their families were the ones to adjust – to wait, to console, to pay more, to change the wedding time or venue. However, the fathers – and sometimes the women – consoled themselves that hopefully these last *"compromises"* would finalise the woman's happiness and prevent the threatened disaster of the cancelling of the wedding.

In any case, a dowry and/or a wedding – financed by the woman's family – manifested the bonds and alliances between two families: the bonds strengthened within kin in the case of close-kin marriages and the bonds created between two kin in the case of non-kin marriages. An arranged marriage re-created the social order based on kinship and gender hierarchies. In contrast, in the case of love marriages, no dowry was given and marriages were rarely performed publicly. Moreover, love marriages confused the social order and challenged caste and kinships structures by re-negotiating gender relations. In the following paragraphs, I will look at the bonds and unions that were created or loosened between persons

and families when relational women entered into love marriages. I will also seek to answer the question: How did the women's agency become acted out or denied at the threshold of love marriage and what were the consequences of it for the women's self-presentations or their self-constructions as relational persons?

Entering into a Love Marriage

Nearly one third of the divorced and separated women in this study had entered into a love marriage (15 out of 52 marriages, see appendix 1) by marrying a man of their *"own choice",* usually belonging to a different caste[55] or to a different religion.[56] The parents opposed these marriages although in two cases they had preferred their daughters to search for their own partners.[57] Typically the husbands of love marriages were estranged from their natal families due to migration or a family tragedy or they just did not get along with their natal family members.

A half of the women of love marriages were middle and upper class women in their twenties. They had got to know their future husbands while they were studying or working and living in a hostel in a different city far away from their parents. Often, they became acquainted with their future husbands through their friends or in common gatherings of friends, colleagues or co-students at their friends' houses or in hostels. Gradually, the common get-togethers of friends changed into to more private meetings in response to the initiative of the future husband-to-be.

The other half of these women were younger, belonging to a variety of social strata and still living with their parents. They narrated to me quite similar stories, often including the same dramatic sentence: *"then he started to follow me".* The future husbands *"followed"* the women who went, usually together with their friends, to the colleges, to taking tutorials, to educational institutes or to their working places. The women empha-

[55] The exceptions were 3 Christian women and 1 Hindu woman who belonged to the same community as their husbands of love marriages.

[56] There were five cases of inter-religion marriages: Satyanarain (Hindu-Muslim), Savitri (Hindu-Jain), Anita (Christian/Hindu-Hindu), Aruna (Christian/Syrian Christian-Hindu) and Rossy (Christian/Catholic-Christian/Protestant).

[57] According to first woman, her liberal father wanted to save on the dowry money and according to the second woman, her parents considered the finding of a match for her too difficult because of her previous-yet-now-cured illness. However, even these fathers expressed their doubts about their daughters' actual choices.

sised that they did not even notice their husbands' initial efforts. While "following", the future husbands collected information, mainly through friends, about their lives and family backgrounds, which they then used when trying to create contact – or "line" (see Osella & Osella 1998, 193) – with the women. Some husbands wrote letters, others talked affectionately about their beautiful future together. Gradually, the women started to respond to their future husbands: one carried out a small task required by him, another smiled back at him and a third started to talk to him. The women described how they slowly – after two weeks, months, or even years – became "*friends*"[58] with their future husbands. These now divorced and separated women's narrations are consistent with many of Osella & Osella's (1998) observations about young people's pre-marriage flirting and romantic relationships in Kerala. There contacts begin with *tuning* – tentative exchange between the two and continue with the two having a *line* – a mutual agreement to speak (and exchange glances) when they meet by chance if the girl proves ready to speak and take things further (Osella & Osella 1998, 193). Osella & Osella (ibid., 194) demonstrate the ambiguity – and the aesthetics – embedded in these actions of flirting: the pairs are playing out complex patterns of dominance and submission, in a more subtle form of hierarchic heterosexuality than in the act of harassment – they are "playing with gender", ironizing it through exaggeration. According to Osella & Osella (ibid., 199) it is always a girl's decision whether she can take the potential risk to her reputation of moving forward into romance proper, involving secret pre-arranged meetings and letters; at this point, the normative hierarchical gender dyad, already confused by "tuning" behaviour, become reversed.

Some divorced and separated women of this study, nevertheless, felt themselves *"forced"* into their decision of moving forward into the relationship of *"going around"* or *"going out"*. Lalithamma,[59] whose mother had just passed away, recollected the caring and consoling letters she received from her future husband after the funeral of her mother in which the husband had also turned up with his friends. Her future husband wrote that he went there to put a handful of soil on her mother's grave by taking oath that he would marry Lalithamma and take care of her like a flower. *"That way he really forced me to reply,"* she explained. Besides,

[58] The women used the English word "*friend*" even if they otherwise spoke in their local language.

[59] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.

by reading such letters she also fell in love with him. Other women also described how such friendships changed into *"love"* and how they were finally *"madly in love"* with their future husbands. *"At that time I felt that he was the one who was made for me by god",* one woman explained. Furthermore, some women analysed how their husbands succeeded in filling the empty feeling caused by their lack of love or need for approval originating from a misfortunate childhood – the loss of a mother or a sister or a serious sickness – or, similarly, the women were so badly *"needed"* by their poor, sad husbands that they could no longer resist their requests for a deeper relationship. *"I was always very good at taking care of people,"* one woman explained. In both cases the "love relation" substituted for the loss of fundamental bonds or deprivation of relatedness. Nevertheless, some women explained that they were never *"in love"* with their husbands, however, they considered them as a suitable match – they had the right background qualities – or were supportive of the women's career plans or liberal ideas and so the women approved of taking matters further. These relationships of *"going around"* or *"going out"* included secret meetings, going to movies, going out to eat and correspondence in some cases but never a sexual relationship. Once the women had got involved with their relationships some of them also started to initiate meetings. While the romances investigated by Osella & Osella (1998, 200) cultivated experiences of *srngaram*, desire, unconsummated love leading only very occasionally to marriage as the couples engaged in romance generally had no intention of going against parental wishes; in this study the relationships of the divorced and separated women were represented by themselves, from the very beginning, serious relationships heading towards a marriage which was constantly promoted by the husband.

Sooner or later someone – a neighbour, a friend, a colleague, a relative – informed the women's fathers about their daughters' relationship. At this turning point the women's power of making decisions – and their agency – became both expressed and questioned. In addition, their bonds to the parents were now in jeopardy. At first, the fathers found it hard to believe the rumours. According to the women, the fathers clearly expressed their disappointment: the women were beaten or slapped by their fathers, they were told that they had *"dishonoured his prestige"*, *"insulted him", "made a mistake"* or even that she *"should die"* or she does *"no longer belongs to the family"*. All the fathers and most of the mothers and brothers were against the potential marriage. They, together with

other trusted relatives, such as one mother's sister and another mother's brother, requested the women to give up their relationship as it was *"the wrong route"* she had chosen because the husband would not take care of the woman in the end. Instead, she should take a better groom candidate chosen by them.

At this point, some future husbands approached the women's parents – some came to propose in person, others proposed via the women. Usually the husband's family stayed in the background or were absent, however, in a case of Lalithamma, the husband's drunken father and the woman's furious brothers kept on fighting with each other. At this point, many women articulated clearly to their parents that they want to marry nobody else but their husband, *"I had decided to marry him",* they declared to me. Nevertheless, if the woman, torn between two sides, was momentarily wavering, the husband would show his despair by following the woman, crying aloud or by threatening suicide if he were rejected. Manjula,[60] recollected how both her father and her husband had threatened to take poison but *"at that point in time I liked him (her husband) more than my father"*, so she chose the husband. However, she had also succeeded in convincing her father to arrange her marriage with him. More often, the father – or the mother or the brother – threw the disobedient daughter out of the house or made it clear to her that she was no longer welcome in their home. The incident clearly cut the bonding between the woman and her natal family – she did not belong to her natal home or family anymore. *"I was very ashamed, shy and angry… I am not going to go back at any cost,"* Lalithamma described her feelings after her brother threw her out of the house. One woman was able to stay with her neighbours, others with their husbands' friends. Now the women became very determined that their marriages should take place and that marital life should begin.

The women were forced to choose between the husband and the father. According to the women's own definitions of *dharma* and their notions of morality, once they had each become involved with the husband, by taking another man they would lose their *"purity"*. As people are thought to share substance through intimate and intensive transactions (e.g. Marriott 1976; Daniel 1984), once the women were involved in sharing with their husband - sharing food, going out together, writing to each other, talking, touching, holding hands, sharing secrets – these

[60] H, 36, m, s/u, 3c.

women considered themselves as "belonging" to their to-be-husbands. According to this idea, a woman's "fluid personhood" had already started its transformation into wifehood by absorbing her future husband's substance through interaction. Besides, also other people knew about their *"going around",* thus, it would not look good in their eyes either. Actually, some women's neighbours or colleagues took the women's side and supported their decisions to think more about *"themselves"* or their *"own future"* than to their families or, for example, the motherless brothers in the case of Lalithamma. However, even this support signalled that woman's love marriage was considered as her "individualistic" choice that worked against the "common" good and holistic idea of family and kin. On the other hand, from the women's point of view, by choosing their husband they were already working on behalf of their husband and on behalf of the common good and wholeness of their future family of a love marriage.

These divorced and separated women made decisions about starting a relationship or choosing a husband which made their acts of agency noticeable. In fact, they developed from the ones who *"were followed"* into the ones who *"decided";* from object to subject. Simultaneously, they felt pressed, confused and forced to choose, thus, their decisions were ambiguous and related to other's acts. As in the case of an arranged marriage and dowry demands, the divorced and separated women described how impossible it was to stop the chain of events when they started the process towards marriage. Simultaneously, the hierarchy embedded in gender relationships became evident: it was a woman whose position was particularly vulnerable. Although the women acts definitely confused "the normative hierarchical gender dyad", it hardly got reversed as Osella & Osella 1998 (199) suggest as happening in the case of entering into a romance. In contrast, the hierarchy became visible when things ran of out their hands: it was the woman who was blamed most for the issue – she should have acted differently, she should not have approved her husband's suggestions, she made a mistake.[61] In fact, the ambiguity embedded in the gender hierarchy on the whole becomes manifested through these women's "failures". On one hand, a woman is given a high position and lot of power: she is not only a gate keeper and the protector

[61] Even the woman who was kidnapped, raped and kept as a hostage for more than a year talked about her *"mistake"* the consequences of which she wanted to save her mother from.

of family honour and the caste hierarchy but also her husband's life is in her hands. On the other hand, women, in general, are understood to be more open and exposed to mixing than men and more vulnerable to impurity and to engaging improper sexual liaisons: they must be protected and their sexuality needs to be contained, controlled and channelled by men and by the social structure toward procreation and the protection of the family (e.g. Harlan & Courtright 1995, 11; Lamb 2000, 183). However, as soon as these "vulnerable women" act, according to these general fears, by engaging themselves in improper liaisons those – fathers, brothers, mothers – who should have "protected" or "controlled" women put the whole blame on the women themselves. Usually a woman is blamed more than her husband about the relationship whose initiator the husband is. Thus, although love marriages challenge the gender hierarchy, they do not abolish it nor the women's more vulnerable position within it. On one hand, the women are given power – to make decisions – but, on the other hand, she has a high price to pay for it. Thus, their acts and agency are always contextualised and take place within the hierarchical structure of society even if they simultaneously challenge it.

On the whole, the entering into of a love marriage and by acting against their fathers, natal families and kin led the women to each lose their bonds to their own natal family and to other important consanquineal relatives. Moreover, the woman's consanquineal relatives each pointed their finger at the woman's father, which increased kinship tensions and the father's feelings of anguish towards his daughter. Unlike arranged marriages, love marriages dis-united the families in the threshold of marriage. Interaction between the future affinal families was mainly hostile and destructive – if there was any. A couple of husbands who married lower caste woman succeeded in keeping first the relationship and then the marriage a secret from their families for years. Consequently, these women's affinal bonds to their husbands replaced their multiple bonding within the natal family and among consanguineal relatives as well as hindered their changes of creating affectionate bonds to their affinal family and kin. The love marriage as a challenge to patrilineage became established through each women's father and brother who disowned the woman as well as through the husband's family's hesitance to accept the woman. Their "relationality" became deprived as it was outside of the caste and kinship hierarchies (cf. Dumont 1980), nor did they undergo ceremonial transactions and transformations (cf. Marriott 1976). Thus,

many women felt isolated even when they were finally marrying the husband of their "own" choice.

Conclusion: Strengthened and Challenged Relationality

The principle of hierarchy as the central ordering principle of social organisation in India becomes either accentuated or challenged through the women's arranged marriage or through their negation, love marriages. Later, this pattern becomes reversed again if the women's marriages turn out to be failures: failed arranged marriages disorder the social structure and hierarchical principles *in practice* whereas failed love marriage reinforce the *ideal* or ideology of an arranged marriage and its hierarchical principles – the women's "mistake" of entering into a love marriage "prevents" her chances of belonging to an ideally beneficial, hierarchical social structure. Through this "mixing model" different forms of hierarchies – i.e., caste, gender, age and family hierarchies – become reinforced or challenged, or both in turn.

Accordingly, the women's self-construction as relational persons becomes further strengthened – and challenged – through the transactions leading to marriage. Marriage negotiations and dowry payments, by which a woman is represented by her father, mother or other family members, creates alliances within a kin or between two kin, and so also strengthens the women's relatedness within kin. On the other hand, the women's own transactions of *"going around"* including intimate sharing and interaction with her future husbands play a major role in the case of love marriages and reinforces the women's relatedness outside of the conventional kinship structure and kin relations. The kinship structure thus becomes challenged but the women's "relationality" was further strengthened by intensive transactions with the future husband – the women each becoming part of their husband and their mutual family by virtue of the love marriage.

At this moment, the divorced and separated women's – "relational persons" – their own will or agency becomes either denied or affirmed, or both. Thus, the women's narrations about entering into marriage support the idea presented by other scholars (e.g. Säävälä 2001, 103-104; Lamb 1997, 282; and the general idea of Ewing 1990) that Indian personhood

– although starkly positional, permeable and relational – also leaves space for personal experience and for a motivational actor who may also express her will, even against the will of others. However, their choices and actions as well as their consequences always take place within the social and cultural context of caste, kinship and gender hierarchies and as part of the ongoing power struggle of society. Thus, the consequences of these expressions – such as entering into a love marriage – are remarkable in relation to the women's future bonding, transactions and self-constructions as they challenge the whole hierarchical kinship system and society. In a way, this supports the idea of flexibility in a person's self-construction as proposed by the studies inspired by enthnosociolocigal approach. However, the women's difficulties in getting their will across, such as in some cases of arranged marriages in which the women opposed their parents will, support the idea of the fixity of hierarchical relations and "relationality" as emphasized in the "attributional model". Similarly, an arranged marriage strengthens and reproduces the hierarchy whereas the love marriage challenges it but as both of these marriage forms may lead into their negations – through the marital breakdown that mixes up the relations and relationality of persons, the models embedded with flexibility are needed even more. Thus, although the "attributional model" of Dumont helps us to understand the structure, the hierarchy of different categories and stability of Indian society, marital breakdown repeatedly challenges the structure and the hierarchy. Thus, instead paying attention to what happens within a structure, this study needs to focus on what happens between the structures and how the foundations of the structures are bent. Consequently, I will consider the interpretations of the fluid person and the ideas of constructing person through interaction and the sharing of the substances, inspired by the ethnosociological approach regarding this study. I will then carry on developing these ideas in the following chapters of this study. In the next chapter, I will look at, from the women's perspective, how the bond between a husband and wife either failed to be created or to be maintained. I will start by looking at marriages in a manner which is in contrast to the general view of marriages representing the connectedness, the binding not only the husband and wife but also their families together. Instead, I will look at the loss of bonds, the weakening of bonds throughout marriage and marital life.

3. TROUBLED TRANSACTIONS IN THE AFFINAL HOME

The Beginning of Wifely Transformations

Marital Bonding

Ideally marriage binds two families and two persons of these families together for ever. Through the marital bond, families became affines or they enhance their affinity and persons become a complementary union of husband and wife. Marriage is "a ritualized, public and formal sharing of persons and the materials of life among families," as Trawick (1996, 155) describes. Moreover, the marriage ceremony is one of the major rituals of the life cycle that alters a person's status and position. The marriage rituals not only express these alterations but define, construct, and interpret them for the actors themselves (see Fruzzetti 1982, 9). The women's 'fluidity' and 'permeable' quality (Busby 1997a; Daniel 1984; Fruzzetti et al. 1992; Trawick 1990, 133; Säävälä 2001, 105) facilitate the transformation of their personhood which is necessary in order to incorporate them into their husband's families and to become the full personalities of first auspicious wives and later, blessed mothers (Fruzzetti 1982, 31). Moreover, it is also a step towards adulthood – a necessary requirement of the mature adult status of both a woman and a man (e.g. Osellas 2000, 81) but it is even more urgent and absolutely essential for a woman, in order to achieve her social identity as a "full woman" (Kapadia 1996, 17).

Among the Hindus and Christians of India, marriage began as a sacrament implying a permanent and indissoluble union but later changed due to legislation whereas among Muslims marriage has been regarded as

a civil contract from the very beginning (Diwan 1998, 23-25).[62] Under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, which provides for the performance of marriage by civil ceremony, marriage is essentially a civil contract (ibid.).[63] In South India the gold ornament *tali* is the most important signifier of the marriage and "tying a *tali"* is consider the key ritual of it – regardless of whether the marriage ceremony takes five days or five minutes. Among Hindus, tying a *tali* is conducted in the most auspicious moment astrologically. A girl's parents try to secure their daughter's future by maximizing auspiciousness in the marriage ceremony: by choosing the time, place, dress and all other details according to notions of auspiciousness. The wedding is a sign connoting all auspicious happenings, moods, and events (Säävälä 2001, 104; for more about auspiciousness, see Säävälä 2003, 231-233). The woman's bonds to her husband and his family are created symbolically by binding a woman to her husband. A *tali* is tied around a woman's neck usually by a husband himself or by a female relative of his among Muslims or/and the rings are exchanged among some Muslims and Christians.[64] According to Ram (1992, 89), the symbolism of binding, such as the binding of hair and sari evoked by the puberty ceremony, reaches its most explicit statement of male control in the wedding ceremony: a tying of the *tali* around the women's neck by her husband. It can be described as the definitive act whereby 'a man binds, ties and harnesses [the woman] to him, to his family with symbol of lineage he represents' (Baker-Reynolds 1978, 230). Other symbols of a married woman also carry the same symbolism of binding: bangles on

[62] According to Diwan (1998, 23-25) Christian marriage in India is now a contract and it is usually solemnized by a Minister of Religion licensed under the Christian Marriage Act 1872 or by the marriage Registrar. In contrast, according to Pothen (1987, 43) the Church and Christian Community of India still maintain the view that marriage is an indissoluble institution. According to Diwan (1998, 23-25), since The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 Hindu marriage has no longer remained an indissoluble union, however, it is still called a holy union; it has semblance of both contract and sacramental union. In my view, this confusion of definitions illustrates well the complex questions about the nature of the marital union.

[63] A marriage solemnized in any other form under any law between any two persons may be registered under the Special Marriage Act, and, on registration, such a marriage for all intents and purposes is treated as performed under the Act (Diwan 1998, 52).

[64] Tying a *tali* with the symbol of the cross was common among many Christians in this study, e.g., Catholics and the Syrian Christians of Kerala to whom a ring is an additional symbol whereas to other Christians e.g. Protestants of Baptist/Methodist or SCI -background were exchanging rings. The registration of marriage is compulsory under The Christian Marriage Act, 1872 (Diwan 1998, 51).

wrists, rings on fingers or on toes and the oval or circular dot of *kumkum* or *bindi* put on the forehead.

A woman whose husband is alive is an auspicious wife, *sumangali*, i.e., *muttaide* in Kannada: the *tali* around a woman's neck is a symbol of it. According to Srinivas's (1999, 153) study in a village in Karnataka, the relationship between a husband and wife is conceived asymmetrically: while the married state is regarded as the only possible one for adults it has greater significance for women than men. According to the orthodox, Brahman ideology of *Pativratya,* the wives should be deeply devoted to their husbands, serve them and protect them and even to die first in order to fulfil the perfect embodiment of wifely auspiciousness (Harlan and Courtright 1994, 12-13; Dhuruvarajan 1989, 26-27; Caplan 1985, 54-55; Gough 1997, 167). On the other hand, Trawick (1996, 179) points out that the nature of the bond between the husband and wife is vague, neither clearly hierarchical nor clearly egalitarian. Although the ideal of chastity and devotion to the spouse is entirely a female ideal, entailing a wife's subordination to her husband, the men themselves may advise other, younger, men to consider their imminent wives as "a goddess entering your home": at the level of ideology, either the male or the female may be regarded as superior depending upon who is talking and under which circumstances (ibid.).

In this chapter, I suggest that the gendered transformation of wifehood results not only from the marriage but also from the transactions of marital love – the sharing and exchanging of material and immaterial substances such as food, money, goods, services and sex – that create and maintain the bond between the husband and wife. I took marriage as the initial step – and therefore the most crucial step of this transformation – "the first night" i.e. the start of the sexual life as the second step, the move to affinal home and marital life as the third step and the birth of the child as the fourth and final step of this transformation of wifehood as the child is an outcome and a proof of the marital relationship and the woman's potency as a wife but simultaneously it is also the start of another gendered transformation – the transformation of motherhood.

While marriage is a rite of passage but also the life crisis for most Indian women, the divorced and separated women emphasised the negative causes, connotations and consequences of it because their transformation of wifehood did not eventually succeed. For example, while most of the village women investigated by Säävälä (2001, 143) reminisced about the

beginning of their marital life with humour by describing their suffering with smiles on their faces, most of the divorced and separated women in this study narrated their stories very seriously, in a sad or indignant tone, sometimes with tears in their eyes. In the following paragraphs, I will look at how the divorced and separated women presented the crucial turning points of their marriages and marital lives. I will look, from the woman's perspective, at what happens when the creation or maintenance of the marital bond between husband and wife fails and a woman's transformation into wifehood is obscured by competing bonds and other conflicts in the different stages of this transformation. How do the women's struggles to overcome their marital problems manifest the women's self-construction as relational persons within the gender and kinship hierarchies of South India? As the 'fluidity' and the 'permeable' quality of the women (Busby 1997a; Daniel 1984; Fruzzetti et al. 1992; Trawick 1990, 133; Säävälä 2001, 105) is assumed to facilitate her through the transformation at the stage of marriage, does it also help her to cope when this transformation fails?

Losing while Forming Affinal Bonds

Formally the marriages of the divorced and separated women were conducted according to the rituals and practices of their particular religion or by civil ceremony, under the Special Marriage Act.[65] The better economic and social position the woman and her family had, the grander the marriage was performed. Furthermore, even a couple of poorer women's fathers managed to arrange grand weddings for their daughters including valuable gifts to the wedding couple thanks to the generous donations via the Mosque from *"rich Muslims"* in whose houses the women and their mothers had previously worked as maids. For example, Fatma's[66] marriage expense of 80 000-90 000 rupees was in great contrast to her husband's daily wage of 50 rupees and her own income of 3,50 rupees per the making of 1000 incense sticks. Nevertheless, all publicly performed marriages were huge investments by women's natal families financially, socially and emotionally. The guests – all important relatives and friends – were invited to take part in rituals, to bless the couple, to give presents,

[65] The exceptions were two forced marriages and one fake marriage in which the future husband tied *a taḷi* to a woman in a private hotel room.

[66] M, 35, p, s/u, 5c.

to follow the wedding and, in return, to eat and enjoy the hospitality of the host. Through this ritual exchange and sharing, the guests are made involved in the matter at least as witnesses of the union. They also witnessed the woman's parents goodwill and heavy efforts towards the happiness of their daughters and the width and prosperity of their social and familial networks – the values of the wedding gifts as well as the worth of the family members and other guests in terms of e.g. saries and jewellery were always calculated in the minds of the guests I learnt while attending weddings with my informants. The photographer and video camera recorded the marriage from the rituals to the outlook of the guests. These 'sweet memories' as they were usually labelled on the covers of the photo albums were also important evidence of the marriages, particularly among Hindus who did not register their marriages anywhere at the time of my fieldwork.[67] The civil marriages of love marriages were usually witnessed by the husband's friends and in some cases celebrated modestly with mutual friends afterwards. The wedding photo was usually taken after the marriage as proof of it.

According to the majority of women of arranged marriages there was lot going on behind the scenes during their marriages: old and new bonds, unions and loyalties were clashing or the secrets of past were being revealed, even on the marriage day itself. Some women and their family members recollected the omens of ill fortune they witnessed during the day – the petrol of the wedding car run over, the chain of one *tali* broke, a woman's father fell sick, one of the groom's fathers arrived late, the groom was behaving in a strange manner etc.,– whereas other women and their families realised that, without a shadow of a doubt, they *"were cheated"*. The groom or his family or other circumstances did not correspond with the previously given image, for example, the aunty who was the main arranger of the marriage was discovered to be having a relationship with the husband-to-be or the future mother-in-law was found out to be using *"evil powers"* against the woman: the woman felt that her mother-in-law was talking inside her head, giving her instructions and making her feel alien to herself. In some cases also other guests, particularly close relatives, observed that things were not proceeding in the spirit of the auspicious wedding: there was no harmony but rather

[67] This changed recently, as The Supreme Court of India ruled in February 2006 that all marriages irrespective of their religion, must be compulsorily registered (e.g. Mahapatra 2006; Venkateshan 2006).

some kind of disorder. They were commenting on and pointing at the woman's parents– 'why on earth they had selected this kind of match for their daughter? Indirectly, they were also accusing the parents of risking the reputation of the family by an unsuccessful choice of the groom.

Nevertheless, a minority of the divorced and separated women of arranged marriages said that they had liked or enjoyed their weddings and that the weddings went on well and as planned. It was considered a normal step of life to take for elder and educated women, the possibility of a better life for some of the poorer, parentless women, a big relief for those whose husband had postponed the arrangements and an exciting event of her being in the limelight – wearing lot of jewels and a grand sari, receiving gifts and meeting all the guests, particularly cousins and friends – for those who were *"too young"* or *"innocent"* to understand what a marriage meant regarding having to a husband and marital life. *"I was really happy. I think it was the last day I felt happy,"* one woman commented.

However, feelings of loss were those which were the most prominent feelings of the women while they were talking about their weddings. Certainly feelings of loss are part of every wedding in India. Marriage, when the daughter leaves the household of her mother, is a cutting of the vine (Trawick 1996, 163). Contradictory expectations concerning natal and conjugal relationships are a repeated theme of many folksongs, particularly 'departure songs' sung by the women (in North India, Raheja 1994, 57). However, the negative feelings of the divorced and separated women became even more accentuated as the ominous wedding feelings turned out to be substantiated. The younger the divorced and separated women were, the more unprepared they had considered themselves to be to enter into marital bonding. However, even those women in their twenties who were ready to move on suffered from the forthcoming loss. According to them, they had got too used to living with their natal family – they were like *"flowers to be taken from their roots*" or they were first *"overprotected"* and after tying a *tali* pushed all alone into the *"dangerous river"* of marital life. *"Fear"* was the most common word the woman used in order to describe their feelings during the marriage. Many women considered the loss of the parental bond traumatic and the prospect of binding themselves to the husband and his close family, even in close-kin marriages, hard to live up to. Some worried about the expectations of their mothers-in-law regarding the household chores and others about the expectations of their husbands regarding marital life. Furthermore, the problems and

the exposed secrets the women met during the marriage increased their anxiety about the future. As result, some women said that they did not feel *"anything"* at their wedding: they were *"acting mechanically"* or *"it was not at all like a marriage for me, even my sister felt so"*, as one woman commented. Tarek[68], described her feelings on the wedding:

> I had no feelings towards him [the husband]. My mind was blank. I had this blankness from the day my marriage was arranged… *I had the feeling of losing something in my life.* I missed and lost something. It was that kind of pain which I cannot express and which no one can realise. I had lost interest in my life.

On the other hand, for the women who had entered into a love marriage, a marriage, above all, strengthened, confirmed and formalised their existing bonds to their husbands. It increased and deepened their series of interactions and substance-sharing with their husbands and made it more socially acceptable. Consequently, their dominant feeling during the marriage was one of relief. As these women had struggled a lot for their marriage, they were satisfied when it finally took place and proved their husbands' good intentions. However, the feelings of loss or sadness crept into these marriages or into these women's minds because of the missing, important guests. These women had already broken their bonds to their parents and natal family by selecting their husband. The form of their marriages manifested the fact that these marriages did not unite but rather separate the families. The marriages were organised in a simpler form and its main organiser varied from the husband, the couple together or the woman herself, to the woman's father or parents or the woman's mother' sister. These couples of different religions, went for a civil marriage and others organised a simple ritualistic marriage. Only the friends or the closest relatives who had at least somehow approved of the marriage witnessed it. Usually the parents, at least from one side, were missing. Loss of the important guests amplified the consequences of the women's choice – she did not have a support group around her. Parvati[69] described her feelings during her marriage as follows:

[68] H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c.
[69] H, 32, p, s/u, 4c.

> After all these problems I got married, so I was satisfied. But at the same I was not very happy because I married against my parents' will and very few guests had come to the wedding. At the same time I also thought that whatever happens I should be with my husband till I die.

A non-ritualistic civil marriage did not feel to be adequate enough for some. They performed a religious, ritualistic marriage ceremony or a ritual in addition to the earlier civil marriage: one Syrian Christian family wanted to avoid *"scandal"* and the Hindu husband converted to Christianity before the church wedding. Another Hindu woman said she felt *"guilty"* particularly in the office where she was working without the *tali* and toe rings that married women usually wear. Moreover, she felt *"afraid"* that something wrong might happen because they had not married according to their custom. In addition, one woman confirmed her privately tied *tali* by a civil marriage *"in court"* hoping that it would improve her husband's behaviour and her position in relation to the husband's family.

Efforts at Creating Intimacy

The start of sexual life and/or *"the first night ceremony",* expression used in English and "*prastha"* when speaking in Kannada, carry on the transformation a woman goes through after the marriage ritual. I consider it as the second step in the gendered transformation of wifehood. It continues the loosening of the bond between parents and daughter while strengthening the bond between a husband and wife. It includes the physical transformation from a virgin-daughter to a wife and a potential mother. Thanks to the 'fluidity' of the women, their 'openness' and vulnerability to impurity, the first experience of sexual intercourse had a permanent effect on them. For example, Bengali villagers investigated by Lamb (2000, 185) believe that sexual intercourse takes place within a woman and outside a man: once she has slept with a man, a woman contains some of his substance within her permanently – although a man can sleep with a woman with no real lasting effect. An Indian saying illustrates this notion of the openness and permeability by likening women to earthen water jugs which are permeable and became easily contaminated to such an extent that they cannot be purified whereas men are like impermeable brass jugs which are difficult to contaminate and easy to purify (Lamb 2000, 186; Jacobson 1978, 98).

Sexual relationship involves the exchange of the highly potent transformative substance of sexual fluid, i.e. *intiriam* as it is called by Tamil villagers, investigated by Daniel (1984, 163-164). They view the formation of the fetus as resulting from the combination of fluids secreted by female and by male at the same time during intercourse: The fetus is like a sprout, woman like a field and the man like a seed that is sown (ibid.). Thus, through the sexual relationship women and men most effectively demonstrate their femaleness and maleness and enact this gender difference; as also noted by Busby (1997b, 267-269) in her study in Marianad, South India. Together, through a marital relationship, a wife's and husband's absolute, categorical difference makes them like two halves of the whole: their capacities joined together enable them to engage their productive and reproductive potency in an ongoing exchange that results in a house, wealth and children (ibid.).

In South Indian, the consummation ritual is usually organised within a couple of days of the marriage ritual if the bride has come of age. As Säävälä (2001, 126) points out in her study about familial power relations, the first night ceremony underlines the fact that sex life, and especially that of a woman, is primarily under the authority of the older generation, and secondarily of the husband. Putting these two things together – sex life uniting a couple and, yet, being under the control of the older generation or secondary to of the husband – creates a ground for conflicting the bonds and interests of differently-related people.

The first night ceremony of the divorced and separated women was usually organised as part of marriage procedures in the women's natal homes and in a few cases at the end of the marriage procedures in a woman's affinal homes. In the case of love marriages, one husband's friend organised the ceremony in his house or, in other cases it was not organized at all.

The divorced and separated women who commented on their first night recollected their inconvenience or horror which originated from their own ignorance or from the *"forcing"* they experienced.[70] The younger women felt that their parents had betrayed them or even *"sold"* them to their husbands. Afterwards, they either ran to their parents for comfort or decided not to go back to them for any reason whatsoever any-

[70] See for similar experiences among village women e.g. Säävälä (2002, 124-125) and Dhuruvarajan (1989, 85). On the other hand, urban middle and upper class women investigated by Puri (1999, 118) were anxious but also anticipated and expected to enjoy – and enjoyed – their first sexual experiences with their husbands.

more. Some elder and more educated women also considered themselves too unprepared for and too pressed to move into the sexual relationship in such haste that tradition required – they would have preferred to get to know their husbands better first. The discomfort some women felt increased when their husbands revealed to them their earlier or still ongoing sexual relations after the start of their sexual life. On the other hand, some divorced and separated women commented that they had enough *"knowledge of these things"* because they were educated or they had married friends, and a couple of poorer women told that their husbands had explained to them about their husband-wife relationship and consoled them. In addition, a few women said they were *"happy"* after their first night. One woman sneered how it was she who woke up her husband on their wedding night and this sole intercourse led to the birth of their daughter. However, usually the husbands bear alone the onus of the first sexual experience (see also Puri 1999, 117-118). Two women's marriages never got consummated: one woman was sent back to her natal home before it and the other woman suffered the lack of it throughout her three-year marriage feeling *"very bad, very frustrated, very unwanted, very unloved, unclean – wondering whether I am good enough for him".* On the other hand, some women said they suffered from an overly-active sex life, particularly, at the beginning of the marriage.

The women of this study had a lot of expectations and dreams about their marriages and husbands. They were prepared to adjust to live up to the expectations of a devoted and good wife but they also expected their men to be kind and understanding, or at least, that they would *"take care"* of them financially, physically and even emotionally.[71] Similarly, Trawick (1990, 150-151) points out in her study of kinship in a Tamil village, that regardless of whether they receive it or not, South Indian people, both female and male *expect* pleasure to be a fruit of marriage. They also expect personal and emotional fulfilment to be provided to them *through* the marriage (ibid., 150-151). Personally, I realised this when I returned to India as a married woman. My Indian friends asked me with a well-meaning smile – *how is your marital life?* – expecting me to smile back contentedly.

[71] See also Puri (2000) about the Mumbai based middle and upper class women's expectations of "understanding" husbands (141-143) and intimate marital relationship (116-117).

Actually, some women's expectations were also met and they experienced a good period of time – some months or years – with their husbands, particularly the women of the love marriages. The women nostalgically recollected either their time with a good husband or their good time with a husband. These women's bonds to their husbands grew stronger through the daily transactions of marital love – the sharing and exchanging of material and immaterial substances such as food, money, goods, services and sex. Some poorer women remembered how their then responsible husbands consoled them – from that moment on he would take care of the woman and his family would also be hers. Sometimes the forms of transactions were unconventional but nonetheless reciprocal: some husbands cooked or made coffee for their wives whereas some wives were the breadwinners of the family. Parsadi[72], of a wealthier family background, wanted to give her husband of a love marriage *"all luxurious things since he was from a poor family and his relatives never gave him such things."* The husband took her on tours to Indian "honeymoon destinations" thanks to his work in a bus company or to the cinema, sometimes even three times a day. Parsadi recollected:

> I can not express how nice he used to be and how well he looked after me during those days.… He did not want to see tears in my eyes. He always said that even though he is poor he would look after me very well. I can not believe that he has changed so much.

Also some other husbands took their wives out occasionally – to movies, for evening walks, to parks or even to eat out. Additionally, some husbands of love marriages spent a lot of time at home together with their wives, which is still quite exceptional – even among middle class people as men's are more connected to the public world, outside of the home (e.g. Osella & Osella 2000, 229-230). Moreover, the husbands had a job and they brought money home in order maintain the family. All in all, they gave importance or preference to their marital bond instead of to other bonds or, at least, they treated the women as their wives and fulfilled the basic needs of the family, and so transactions between the husbands and wives were taking place. In comparison to the forth coming problems, the women considered this as a happy time in their lives.

[72] H, 36, m, s/u, 3c.

The divorced and separated women usually met numerous and serious problems – one leading to another – before the final break-up of their marital bond. In the following paragraphs, I will look at how from the women's point of view their marital bond was threatened by and competed with other bonds or sets of relations and loyalties, such as the fundamental bonds of a mother and child – crossing the generations – and also other sexual bonds. I will start by looking at the competing bonds and their manifestations, such as the flows of money, within the affinal home and/or between the affinal and the natal home. I will seek to answer the question of how the women conceptualised their affinal homes.

Roughly half of the divorced and separated women moved to live in the affinal home where other family members, such as husband's mother and father and unmarried sisters and/or brothers were also living. In some cases, the couple started to live with the husband's family but move out together after a couple of years. A conjugal household formed immediately from the beginning of the marriage may be so very common in Bangalore partly due to in-migration – people do not necessarily have their parents living nearby. The other half of the women, including those in love marriages, moved to live with their husbands. The husbands had usually moved from their natal homes before the marriage due to their jobs or other circumstances. Some had also lost their parents or parent as a child or they had become estranged from their natal families. A few couples started to live with the woman and her family.[73]

The Husband-Wife Bond Contested

Competing Bonds: Mothers-In-Law

The move to the affinal home and the beginning of marital life is the third step in the transformation of wifehood described in this chapter, also through negation. The affinal home is supposed to be a woman's eventual place to live with her husband, children and the husband's potential family. Patrilocal marriage contributes to the continuity of the

[73] These unusual settings highlighted their existing problems – these husbands wanted their wealthier wives and their families to maintain him or to make him rich as some kind of compensation for marrying the woman.

patriline but it causes a break in the continuity of the woman's natal kin and this break is felt especially keenly by the daughter who is cut off – albeit only partially and temporarily – not only from the mother but from the entire natal family (Trawick 1996, 167). To move from the natal home into the affinal home after the marriage is a rite of passage and an important step in order to transform a daughter into a wife. Generally, this is considered to most stressful period of a woman's life and this transformation is usually supported by regular visits to her natal home in South India (e.g. Dhuruvarajan 1989, 81; Nishimura 1998, 113; Srinivas 1999, 142; Säävälä 2001, 142-144).

When stepping into the affinal home a woman creates a bond to her husband and to affinal family members and simultaneously all the other bonds within these affinal families and homes are re-shaped due to her entrance. Likewise the bonds to her natal family and kin take their new affinal forms. As most of the women of this study had lived their childhood in a nuclear-type of family, adjusting to the an environment of extended family and performing multiple roles of many interpersonal relationships creates further challenges (see also Rao and Sekhar 2002, 546).[74] Consequently, there is room for potential conflicts and competition regarding the family bonds. As Trawick (1996, 157) put it, "the bond between the generations, the bond between the siblings, and the bond between spouses are likely to come in conflict with each other in any kin-based society." Consequently, these different kinds of bonds are likely to pull a person in different directions, and as one bond grows closer, another may stretch and break (ibid.). According to Trawick (1996, 157-158) four relationships seemed to be especially important to the Tamil people – mother-daughter, father-son, husband-wife and brother-sister – so that the institution of the cross-cousin marriage, with the particular meanings that South Indians ascribe to it, build upon the tension already existing among these bonds. These relationships as well as the tensions between and within them have also been noted by Srinivas (1999, 141-143) and they become prominent in this study: particularly the husband-wife bond was contested by different variations of the mother-child bond across the generations and I will start by looking at them.

[74] According to Rao and Sekhar (2002, 546), the majority of divorced women of their study had lived in nuclear families before the marriage and in extended families after the marriage. Due to the sudden changes in role performance, interpersonal relations and family ambience, the likelihood of conflict between the spouses and other members of the extended family increases (ibid., 546).

The husband's mother – the woman's mother-in-law – was the main figure in the affinal home. Although the woman's father-in-law was usually formally in charge of the affinal house, i.e., its potential owner or tenant, the mother-in-law ruled and directed the daily transactions in it as well as guided the new daughter-in-law, as noted also in other South Indian ethnographies (e.g. Säävälä 2001, 142-143). Only in a minority of the cases, particularly among the poorer divorced and separated women, did things move on harmonious co-operation: the mother-in-law and elder co-sisters taught the newcomer the practices of the house and *"everyone did what they can"*. In most cases, the marital bond of the husband and wife was contested by the parent-child bond of the mother and son. According to Lamb's (2000, 71-75) analysis of conflicting intergenerational relationships in a Bengali village, the family relationship perhaps most fraught with tension and conflicting pulls is between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law: the mother and wife may compete for years for the son's/ husband's attention and loyalty. The same tension has also been noted by the South Indian ethnographies (e.g. Dhuruvarajan 1989, 44-45) and by divorce studies as a cause of divorce (e.g. Rao and Sekhar 2002, 546; Pothen 1987, 125; Choudhary 1988, 81-82).

The mothers-in-law strengthened their own position by further eroding the women's already weak position as a newcomer to the family. These mothers-in-law controlled the women's movement in and out of the house, criticised their way of dressing or taking baths or loaded the women with too much or too heavy household chores – whatever they did they received only complaints about it. These women considered themselves *"as slaves"* because *"even servants were treated better"* than them. The mothers-in-law complained about the women's appearance – dark skin, slimness – or their family background in the front of their husbands. Some women were shocked to listen to the *"filthy language"* their mothers-in-law used.

As the bonds between persons are created and maintained by transactions and by sharing substances through eating and intimacy, these mothers-in-law did their best to increase their transactions with their sons and to reduce the transactions between their sons and the women. For example, the mothers-in-law distributed the food, pampering their sons and giving only leftovers to the women, they showed their anger if they witnessed the son joking and laughing with the woman or they *"lost"* the woman's saris that the son had liked while they were doing

the laundry. Some of these mothers-in-law sought to control their sons' sexual lives, the most essential transaction between a husband and wife in order to create, nurture and maintain their marital bond. They gave harsh remarks about the woman "*acting too much"* on her first night or about her *"loose"* dressing – a nighty instead of a sari – the next morning or they tried to restrict the private time the couple spent together such as travelling or going out together. On the other hand, some mothers-in-law were anxiously waiting for *"good news"* about the offspring and started nagging the women about when there would here be children (see also Reissman 2000, 120-121)? According to the women who were distressed by their mothers-in-law, their husbands were the *"favourite"* sons or the only sons of their mothers. Some had promised to take care of their mothers and not to move out as other brothers had done. The sons gave usually all the money they earned to their mothers or parents and they were restricted by their mothers from giving any money to their wives. These husbands never took the women's side against their mothers, not at least in front of her: "*She [the mother-in-law] would shout and shout for hours and he [the husband] sit like a stone."* The husbands either kept quiet or, most commonly, joined in with making accusations, complaints or supported the demands of the mothers-in-law.

According to some divorced and separated women, the sisters-in-laws were living in the affinal home were also harassing them.[75] Especially those husbands' sisters who were either not married or were widowed. According to the women, those not having husbands themselves, could not bear to see their brothers being happy with their wives. Other sisters-in-law who were not living in the affinal home but were nonetheless often there visiting and eating – as well as commenting and dominating. Particularly, as Trawick (1996, 172-173) suggests, the bond between the brother and sister is a bond of deep longing because of the institution of cross cousin marriages in South India: the marital tie is clearly represented in important ancient and modern stories as a continuation of the sibling tie. According to Trawick (ibid. 181), both in mythology and in real life, it is painful for a sister to watch another woman become the mistress of her mother's house and of her brother.

Furthermore, some women were torn between their husbands and their own fathers or between being loyal either to their affinal or natal

[75] Some fathers-in-law and/or brothers-in-law were also harassing the women, however, they were not considered as "main" harassers by the women.

families. Some husbands – or his family members - wanted the women to ask their fathers for property but the women hesitated to request this as they knew how much the fathers had invested in the marriages and also that they had other siblings to marry off from the natal family. Along with the other problems and conflicts in the affinal family and home, the dowry became an issue. Things that the women had brought were not *"up to the standard"* of the mothers-in-law – they were too less in quantity or quality, made of too cheap material or they were brought too slowly. One woman constantly heard that she had brought no ornaments to the house and another woman was asked to come to see the news about dowry deaths *"that could also happen to you,"* she was told.

The institution of the close-kin marriage did not assure good treatment by a mother-in-law or the family's support for the women. These women felt as lonely as the other wives but even more betrayed when they were mistreated by their own father's sister or when their own mother's mother did not make her son to leave his other unofficial 'wife' because *"she loves her son too much."* Similarly, Kapadia (1996, 44-45) noted in her study that even in traditional Non-Brahmin kinships and within close-kin marriages where women have historically enjoyed higher status and relative independence, the women found that *"kinship burns":* in a crunch decision their interest were likely to be "sacrificed" to protect male interest and to preserve family peace.

Paradoxically, the mothers-in-law who were the most possessive of their own sons wanted to most restrict their daughters-in-law's visits and meetings with their natal families. The bigger the problem the woman faced in her affinal home – also while living alone with the husband – the more her affinals or husband wanted to control her visits to the natal home and meetings with the natal family and to isolate her. These women missed, most of all, their natal homes and the members of their natal families, particularly their mothers. However, the women *"kept quiet"* despite the problems they were facing with their mothers-in-law as long as they could. They knew that their case was not exceptional and that many women – also their own mothers – had faced problems with their mothers-in-law. However, the women felt lonely and considered themselves to be outsiders in their affinal families and homes. Also each mother-in-law would emphasise that it was *"her [the mother-in-law's] house"*. The women's reduced role in daily transactions diminished further her chances of becoming part of the affinal home. The women hoped that the things

would improve in the future – maybe after their first child, or if they would move out of the affinal home, together with the husband.

A New Child and Responsibilities

The birth of a legitimate child is a concrete result and proof of the intimate bond between a husband and wife as well as the final step in becoming a fully personalised wife, i.e., the fourth and final step of the transformation of wifehood described earlier in this chapter. The institutional importance of motherhood in India cannot be overestimated: the normative social biography for an Indian woman mandates childbearing after marriage (Riessman 2000, 112). As a gendered transformation it has a profound meaning for a woman's self-construction. It establishes a woman in the most socially-valued position of womanhood – as mother. By giving birth to a son, a wife ensures the continuity of her husband's lineage and she has fulfilled the womanly *dharman* (e.g. Seymour 1999, 97). South Indian ethnographies emphasises the improvement of a woman's position in her affinal home and family after becoming a mother (e.g. Dhuruvarajan 1989, 87-88). According to Säävälä (2001, 146) she is now an established, benign mother; she embodies auspicious wifehood as a married woman whose husband is alive, and thus, she is respected and cherished by her relatives and the world around her. With a child, she can eventually become an influential mother-in-law and in old age, she can depend on her children (Riessman 2000, 112). The importance of the birth is highlighted by the custom that a woman goes to her natal home, to her mother's care and expertise for the delivery of her children, or at least for the first child (e.g. Srinivas 1999, 142; Säävälä 1997, 109; Dhuruvarajan 1989, 89). She leaves on her fifth or seventh month and stays with her parents for at least the three months after delivery, usually until the child's name giving ceremony is conducted by the woman's parents. After it a woman's husband customarily brings her back home – or to a separate house – to enjoy her improved status. Ideally, new bonds from a child to her/his mother and father, to her/his grand parents and all natal and affinal relatives would increase and strengthen bonds and alliances between persons and families, such as in the case of marriages.

Therefore barrenness was such a tragedy for those divorced and separated women who experienced it that they could not speak about it. One woman who did not have a child after years of marital life told me that although she *"used to love all children like anything"* she *"prevented"* having

them *"by praying to god"* after she found out the real, suspect character of her husband. However, she also had a gynaecologic condition in her uterus. The other woman started her life history by saying that she was *"a victim of dowry harassment"* but after carefully going through her interviews I found out that the real reason for her mother-in-law's harassment was an overly long- awaited conception. According to the divorced and separated women, if a woman did not conceive, she was blamed for it. It was a bigger shame to her than to her husband – or at least the women felt so – no matter if her husband was impotent or medically proved to be incapable of impregnating them or were too busy with other relationships. Moreover, a couple of the upper middle class women were pressured into having an abortion by their husbands because the husband or the woman was first supposed to complete their education. Later these childless women accused their husbands of spoiling their as well as their unborn child's lives and they were really keen on having a child by adoption, if not otherwise.

On the other hand, one third of the divorced and separated women who had children (11 out of 35) said the birth of their first child did *not* improve their position but *"changed"* their husbands and, consequently, their marriages into a worse direction or even ruined it. As a woman traditionally spends a relatively long period in her natal home after the delivery, it gives time for the other bonds and relationships to develop.[76] This became critical for the women's marital bond and relationship. It is a great paradox because this time and custom is considered most of all to be beneficial to a woman: to ease her recovery and improve her position. As transactions between the husband and wife diminished or ended during that time, the husbands seemed to become open to other influences and likely to create and strengthen other bonds to the exclusion of their wives. Particularly husbands of the poorer women who were living alone engaged themselves with *"bad company"* and they learnt *"bad habits"* such as drinking or gambling. According to the women, gradually these bad habits took over their husbands' *"personalities"*. The husbands drinking led inevitably to severe financial problems and to violence against the women. Other husbands created bonds to other women that competed with or took priority over their marital bond. One husband tied a *tali* in

[76] On the other hand, all women did not have a natal home to return to for delivery – somebody's mother or father had died and others were not welcomed there anymore because of their love marriages.

a temple to his "new wife" while others continued their relationships secretly after their wives returned home. Finally, some husbands who were living with their mothers or sisters or visiting them now more often became influenced by them, even against their wives, through the increased interactions of eating and sharing.

Some couples faced contradictory expectations or demands from their natal families after the birth of the child. Sometimes a new-born child reunited the couples of love marriages again with their parents. However, some re-unions of the husband and his family members excluded the woman and the child, for example, one husband started to eat and be with his mother or sister instead of his wife and child, or the woman was marked as an outcast through her avoiding eating with in-laws. Generally, the women and their families believed that a child, especially a son, would strengthen the woman's bond to her husband as well as improve her position in the affinal family. They thus were shocked if the husband did not turn up to take the woman back from her natal home. Moreover, some women believed that the child, an issue of the husband, would give more weight to their needs and more power for them to stand up to their husbands' demands. For example, the women who had faced problems with their in-laws requested their husbands to provide them with a separate home after the first child was born but the husbands chose their natal families instead or the couple started to live separately but the husband was discontent with his wife and stressed with the new situation when he was supposed to maintain his family alone: *"He was gaining his revenge on me",* is how one woman explained the consequences. Another husband kept on giving his salary to his mother instead of his wife although they were living separately.

Some women started to question their husbands' use of money or requested them to bring home more money for the expenses of the child. At the same time, the husbands *"changed"*: they started to come home late, they got angry easily and their whole way of speaking to the woman changed from affectionate to disrespectful or rude, particularly, if the husband was drunk or if the woman was questioning him. Some husbands complained publicly – to the neighbours or to the family members that they were not fed properly by their wives. All women expected their husbands to bring money home, however, nurturing children was clearly the women's responsibility. According to a few women their husbands were *"good fathers"* whereas usually the women said that their husbands

did not care about their children at all but harmed the children's schooling and other chances of a happy life. If the husbands did not bring home enough money, the women continued or started to work on behalf of the children. The women's mothers or the mothers-in-law took care of the children or the poorer women took their children along to their working places as housemaids or even to construction work.

Due to problems caused by the husbands' *"change"* such as drinking, violence and extra-marital relationships, the interaction and transactions between the women and their husbands became less frequent and the bond between them weakened. However, interaction and transactions of the women's and their children's increased, interdependency deepened and bonds between them grew stronger. Their increased transactions – gifts of goods, services, food, care, love and affection – that sustain homes and relationships changed the nature of the affinal home. It became more and more the women's and their children's place while the husbands became more and more like outsiders – the visiting and destructive figures of it. Although the house was often owned formally or maintained financially by the husband, it was made into 'home' by the woman and her homely transactions, sharing and exchange with the children.

Other Bonds of Intimate Interaction

Lifelong monogamy and fidelity to the spouse is the ideal at all levels of society (Trawick 1996, 180). The divorced and separated women also considered faithfulness as essential for a marital relationship. If the husband was having another competing sexual bond or bonds it would eventually ruin the marital bond – that was considered the most common problem and ultimate reason for the marital breakdown by the women.[77] Although some women talked about the rarity of faithfulness among husbands and commented ton heir husband's extra-marital affairs in cynical ways (see also Srinivas 1999, 159-160; Säävälä 2001, 127), other women expressed their pain and described the harm that was caused by the husband's extra-marital relationship.

Some women felt disappointed because they did not even get a chance to create a bond to their own husband because he was already so deeply involved with another woman or he kept on longing for his *"true love"*

[77] A husband's extra marital relations was the most frequent (36,7 %) complaint and cause for their marital breakdown listed by the divorced women of Rao and Sekhar's (2002, 554) study.

with whom he was not allowed to marry. *"He was really crying – crying! – for her, he only talked about how he missed his Sujita"* one woman recollected on the first night of her marriage. On the other hand, those women who had created a close bond to their husbands through sharing and intimate interaction, felt deeply hurt and *"cheated"* after finding about their husbands'other relationships, *"girls"* or *"girlfriends"*. The women of love marriages, who had sacrificed their natal bonds of close interaction for their marital bond and who were mainly sharing and interacting with their husbands were particularly desperate when they realised the *"mistake"* they had made. Manjula[78], of a love marriage, narrated her feelings and the encounter with her husband after witnessing her husband's relationship with another woman:

> I lost my mental balance. First I thought of killing myself. At that moment I did not want anything – house, family, money. Why live if there is no love in my life? I was burning with anger, I slapped my husband as soon as he opened the door. The lady was also standing there. I told my husband that I am going to take poison and he too would die along with me as there was no meaning to live. My husband tried to pretend as if nothing had happened…Then he swore [that nothing had happened] on his own daughter. I got so angry and started throwing all the things around me. I had arranged everything with so much love and affection…

Furthermore, all women suffered from their husbands' relationships socially. They felt ashamed because their neighbours or colleagues talked about them and pitied them. The women isolated themselves and their children from the neighbours in order to avoid such bad feelings. Some women did not question their husbands because they were afraid of being deserted or beaten up by them whereas others requested their husbands to stop their relationships, like Lalithamma:

> I fell to his feet asking him not to repeat it [his infidelity]. But he used to slap me and beat me. I got wound on ear and nose. I used to cry. He never tried to console me. Every time he used to go out of house leaving me crying.

[78] H, 36, m, s/u, 3c.

The women also rebelled against their husbands' infidelity by showing that even they had some power in their hands: one woman requested her husband's girlfriend to give up the relationship and made a complaint about her to the administrative office of her working place, the second woman stole love letters written to her husband in order to use them later in court, the third woman shadowed her husband's secret meetings, sometimes together with her mother, to catch him red handed and a fourth woman made up a "fake" boyfriend in order to make her husband jealous. Some requested their brothers or fathers to question their husbands but the husbands did not respect their advice or, worse, they made their wives look guilty in front of the relatives by complaining about their competence as wives: cooking and taking care of the family as well as in regarding their work outside of the home. According to the women, some husbands were so good at acting – and crying – that everyone used to believe them.

Consequences of the husband's fidelity – the harm – touched not only the bond between the husband and wife but reached to the next generation. Lalithamma's[79] husband *"was going around"* with his colleague when Lalithamma was pregnant for their second child. All the colleagues talked about their meetings and Lalithamma witnessed how her husband purchased the another woman gifts and wrote her love letters during the nights in tamil – some years earlier it was Lalithamma who used to get love letters written in her mother tongue, telegu. *"All these mental worries affected my second child and she was born mentally retarded."* Sometimes the other sexual bonds reduced or gradually ended sexual transactions between the women and their husbands: some husbands preferred their new extra-marital partners and some women said that they *"did not let him touch"* them after finding out about the relationships. This affected the women's self-representations and one's self-construction as a wife because "wifehood" is both constructed and acted out through the intimate sharing of substance with one's husband. Importantly, it also prevented the women's further gendered transformation into the most socially valued form of womanhood, i.e. motherhood, by reducing or preventing their chances of having children; the fourth step of wifely transformation described in this chapter.

On the other hand, the women who did have children were worried about these children who were forced to witness the things that were not

[79] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.

appropriate for them. Furthermore, the husband's extra-marital relationship affected the transactions of money, food and care between the husband and wife. These husbands started to neglect their wives and children more and more. One husband used to take his girlfriends to holiday resorts while his wife and daughters did not have money for food or for the daughters' school fees. The husbands stopped bringing money home and started to demand more money, property or even a dowry from the women or their natal families even after years of marriage. Some husbands took huge loans in order to entertain their girlfriends which they expected their wives to pay off. Following the same logic, some husbands who were having relationships started to suspect or to blame their wives for the same or even to spread rumours about them.

Gradually some husbands' extra-marital bonding and relationships grew stronger and led to official or unofficial second marriages whereas other husbands kept on having irregular, ever-changing relationships more and more openly despite the women's efforts to stop them. Some husbands' impudence grew day by day and finally they took their other wife or girlfriend under the same roof as their wife and children. Kamala[80] told about the final point of her marriage:

> I am a Christian. Our *tali* will be like a cross. We had decided that one day I should change my [Hindu] *tali* to a Christian *tali* [Cross] in Velankanni [a pilgrimage place]. So I had already made one such *tali.* He had taken that *tali* … The other lady was wearing that *tali.* Just imagine how I felt in that situation. He wanted to come inside the house along with the lady. But I caught his collar and pushed him and said if he enters I would pour the kerosine on him and burn [him]. So he got scared. All the children were at home. I told my daughter to call up to the husband's brothers. At the same time he also took that lady to the bus stop and waited for his brothers.

Like Kamala, some could bear their husbands having girlfriends but none of the divorced or separated women were ready to accept their husbands to have a second wife living along with them permanently or even in another house. In contrast, as soon as they came to know about their husbands even unofficial new marriage, they wanted their husband either to choose between them or they each decided not to be the husband's wife

[80] C, 39, m, s/u, 3c.

anymore. Even if bigamy was accepted by Islamic law among Muslims or by the order of local *panchaya* or even by the consulter of the women's organisation, among Hindus, the women – as well as their husbands – considered the situation intolerable.[81] The authorities who advised the women to accept their husbands' second wife justified their decision by the financial responsibility that the husband would provide to both wives – it would be a better option than to be deserted altogether for both of the wives. Nevertheless, the women who had approached the authorities, such as the *panchaya* meeting felt disappointed. Kusum[82] recalled:

> I said either he has to live with me or with the other girl, I don't want to share my husband. In the *[panchaya]* meeting they decided that my husband should spend three days with me and four days with the other girl. I did not like the decision but the elders said I had to accept. But when they gave this decision, I felt bad. I thought instead of living like this I would rather live alone or die.

It seems that, marital bond was given such importance that the women of this study did not consider it shareable with any other woman. Neither was it easily breakable. Trawick (1996, 180) alleged that wife-murders and suicide which took place in her study of a village because the wives had stood in the way of their husband's marrying another woman suggest the marital bond is taken seriously: only death can sever it. Death was, in fact, sometimes close to being an option of the divorced and separated women of this study.

The Destruction of the Marital Bond

Violent Attacks, Desperate Actions

Due to the marital breakdown, the contentious side of the marital relationship became highlighted by the divorced and separated women. South Indian scholars have also generally explored the side of the marital

[81] There is an ongoing debate about gender bias in Muslim Personal Law which permits polygamy for men under certain conditions. However, my material shows that at least bigamy also continues to exist also among Hindus although it has been prohibited by The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. Usually the husbands did not bother to divorce the first wife before they solemnised a new marriage.

[82] H, 38, p, s/u, 3c.

bond where the couple are in conflict and there is a spirit of conflict between the many women and their husbands (e.g. Trawick 1996, 178-180; Srinivas 1999, 141; Säävälä 2001, 120-121; Busby 1999, 232-235). For example according to Trawick (1996, 179-180) wives – often also wage earners – in Tamil Nadu would not automatically accept their subordinate role with their husbands. Consequently, there is a strong spirit of rivalry between many women and their husbands and their relationship is often argumentative in nature (ibid.). Although it is often generally accepted by both men and women that a husband is supposed to keep his wife and children under his control, it is as generally known that wives have the well-developed techniques, or "the weapons of the weak" (cf. Scott 1990) to influence their husbands, for example, by nagging, gossiping, denying food or sex, slowing down actions or appealing to kinsmen over the actions of the husband etc. (e.g. Säävälä 2001, 120-121; Srinivas 1999, 141). As a matter of fact, these sides represent different dimensions of the phenomenon of relative gender status elaborated on by Ortner (1994, 140-141): relative prestige or "status", legitimate male dominance/female subordination and female *de facto* power. According to Ortner (ibid., 140) neither the greater male prestige nor actual male dominance, nor both, however extreme, could wholly negate a woman's capacity to control some spheres of her own and the other's existence and to determine some aspects of their own and the others' behaviour. However, Ortner (ibid., 142) argues, prestige and grass roots power cannot be "balanced" against one another: without cultural prestige, female power is not fully legitimate and can only be exercised in hidden and/or distorted ways. Thus, these separate dimensions as well as the interaction between them should be noted in order to understand gender relations, particularly conflicting ones.

Violence is a husband's ultimate weapon to exercise his domination over his wife. The use of violence received contradictory reactions from the divorced and separated women as well as from the overall society. On one hand, it was still considered, if not accepted, as at least an expected way of dealing with conflict and of asserting the male control or superiority in general. On the other hand, it was *never* accepted by the woman when it was faced by her personally nor was it accepted socially by the authorities such as police, legislative authorities or the women's organisations.

As Moore (1994) points out, understanding violence involves understanding how individual persons construct themselves as subjects in relation to various culturally available representation, categories and practices. Where the attempt to maintain a particular self-image, a fantasy of identity (ibid., 151), becomes impossible, an individual may experience a sense of frustration, a crisis of identity which calls for some response. Thus, men can restore some sense of control over their masculine identity by asserting their power over their wives (ibid., 154). The husbands of the divorced and separated women had failed the women's expectations as well the general assumptions about a man's role as the main care taker of the family – the protector as well as the provider of the house. As a result, many husbands have difficulties dealing with expectations and tensions arising from the web of kinship.

The husband's violence further weakened the bond between husband and wife. The divorced and separated women of all religions and classes reported how their husbands used to beat or hit or *"belt"* them. A couple of husbands were mentally unstable and they tortured their wives causing them serious mental and physical injury, even the threat of death. One woman told how her husband tried to kill her, first, by trying to pour kerosine on her and then by giving her electric shocks and later by trying to force her *"to commit suicide"* by drinking poison, and again, later, by hanging herself. Usually the women were tortured at home, behind locked doors and systematically at the night or, alternatively, out of their husbands' spontaneous bursts of anger or frustration. According to one woman, as soon as she and her husband moved to their own house after 28 years of living together in a rented house, her husband started to *"question her"* and to batter her systematically. He told to the inquiring neighbours that *"no one has right to ask him anything as it is his own house*" and *"our family matter".* If a husband was drinking, it inevitable led to increased violence, particularly among the poorer couples. It was almost considered as a force of nature, just as in a fishing community investigated by Busby (1999, 230). However, unlike in the Busby's community, where was a commonality in the refusal to see violence as men's fault at least partly because of the strong underlying assumption about the interdependence of husband and wife (ibid., 235), the women of this study condemned their husbands and freed themselves of all the responsibility for their husbands' violence. Nor did they comment on any other woman deserving a battering, like the village women investigated

by Säävälä (2001, 113) who described themselves as victims of their promiscuous or drunken husbands but commented on other wives as quarrelsome and thus deserving a battering. The divorced and separated women's husbands had justified their violence by taken for granted male dominance. *"She is my wife so I can do whatever I want with her",* some husbands had replied when their acts were questioned by the women's mothers and neighbours. These others were then asked not interfere their *"family matters"* anymore. Some violent husbands showed further their dominance by asserting control over their wives sexuality. They showed sexual jealousy by *"suspecting"* their wives, by controlling their interaction with men – usually colleagues or customers the women came across while working – and how they dressed and wore jewellery.

The women of this study did not consider the beatings and other violence lightly – they considered them *"unjust"* and wrong. Although some woman had remained silent and put up with their husbands' violent acts for months or years, all of them condemned their husbands for them afterwards (see more in Chapter 3). Moreover, many women said that *"as an educated woman"* they were shocked by their husbands' attitudes and behaviour. Some had questioned the husband's behaviour whilst still married. Sulabha[83] recollected how her husband slapped on her face three times for *"silly reasons"* such as taking a rest before washing dishes. After the third slap, she lost her temper and threatened to cut her husband's arm with a sharp kitchen knife if he ever repeated his act. Later she also threatened to hit her husband with a broom which would be extremely humiliating for the husband. *"I can take all the weapons for my use",* she told me proudly. Quite exceptionally, she even engaged herself in another relationship, then cut her hair in order to irritate her husband and finally left him. One other woman also finally ran away with a man with whom her husband had previously suspected her of having a relationship and which he had used as a reason to batter her.

In this study too, suicide or attempted suicide was the most extreme way of a divorced and separated woman trying to get out of her marital bond or from a situation from which there is no other escape. Suicide is a growing problem in India, especially in South India and West Bengal where suicide rates are high by world standards (Mayer and Ziaian

[83] H, 31, u, s/u, 1c /1996 + H, 35, u, d/j, 1c /2000.

2002, 297-298).[84] Although married women are less prone to suicide when compared with divorced and unmarried women (ibid., 301), disharmony with husband and/or in-laws are reported as causing suicides in Pondicherry of Tamil Nadu (Aleem 1994, 49, cited in Mayer and Ziaian 2002, 303). Moreover, in India there is the historical and both actual and mythical tradition of female suicide or self-destruction in relation to their marital bonding such as *'sati'*, i.e., the self-immolation of a Hindu widow along with the corpse of her husband and such as Sita's ordeal by fire which she went through in order to establish her chastity to her husband Rama in *Ramayana* (e.g. Rajan 1993, 40-63). Some of the divorced and separated women said they thought of killing themselves – death was consider a better alternative than living with the abusive husband – but they usually gave up their plans because of their children or because other people who would still need them. Nevertheless, five women did actually try to commit suicide. For example, Tarak narrated how her husband pressed her to earn money by having sex with his drinking mate and when she angrily refused he beat her badly:

> I felt very bad about the incident. I already had two daughters and I could not bear it when my husband asked me to do such things. At that point in time I thought if I live he would do all these things but if I die I do not have any problem. *There was no solution to my problems and I had no support from my parents.* So I took whatever tablets I could get in the house and ate them. I [had] thought of committing suicide for many times. But every time I thought about my daughters and dropped the idea. When this happened I could not control myself. I told my husband that after burying me he can live whichever lady he wants.

The another woman tried three time to commit suicide, along with her three children by jumping into a well but after hearing her eldest son pleas she dropped the idea for good – *"how could I kill my children?"* This woman considered her own life and her children lives so bounded together they simply could not exist without each other. In the same way, the women's own life was in the hands of their parents. Tarek's suicidal

[84] According to Mayer and Ziaian (2001, 297) study based of the statistics of National Crime Records Bureau 1997, between 1985 and 1995 the official suicide rate for the country as a whole rose from 6.8 to 9.9. per 100 000. Kerala had a suicide rate of 25.9 per 100 000, Tamil Nadu 15.0 per 100 000 and The Union Territory of Pondicherry had a suicide rate of 68.5 per 100 000 in 1995 (ibid., 298).

thoughts (see above) showed that she did not have her parents' support and also other women who tried to commit suicide were estranged from their parents because of their husbands or because of their love marriages. According to Oldenburg's (2002, 224) study of the survivors of bad marriages, in 85 percent of cases a positive signal from the women's parents had changed their thoughts of suicide, but however, according to Kumar's (1989a, 20-21) study, the rejection by the women's parents had caused the mistreated women return to the affinal home to be murdered there (in 13 of 50 cases).

These extreme examples of the husbands' violent attacks and the wives' desperate, self-destructive actions or attempts reveal the existing male domination: it is a wife who gets hurt, if not killed, when there is a fight between a husband and his wife. On the other hand, all these wives are alive and they no longer live with these husbands, thus, they were not wholly dominated by their husbands but could control some space of their own and resist the domination (see Ortner 1994, 140). The most important means to oppose a husband was to seek help and to engage others in the matter. Women told of the problems of their marriage, first to their nearest natal family members – a mother, father, brother or sister – but only when a marital relationship was already in serious danger. If the woman's marriage was an arranged marriage, she knew how much her parents had invested in her good future in the form of dowry and marriage expenses. On the other hand, if the woman's marriage was a love marriage, she felt double-rejected and regretful, *"It was my choice, it was my mistake"* (see earlier). The women wanted to protect their parents from worry for as long as possible (see also Vatuk 2006, 214) but the parents were in shock when they faced the truth and they felt sorry that they had not known earlier. Afterwards, a few women arranged secret meetings with their mothers or fathers during their working days or they kept on calling them without the knowledge of their affinal family members. Some women's mothers were sick of worry.

Sometimes the bond between mother and daughter became crystallized when the woman, the daughter, was in danger. As a deity (Trawick 1996, 169) or as real, the mother is a protector. The mothers even more often than the fathers questioned the misbehaving husbands or their families. In some cases, the women felt that their mothers literally saved their lives by coming to meet them at a critical time when they were sick or distressed. Srinivas (1999, 142) states that, according to his

study in a village in Karnataka, the perils incidental to being a woman and the pervasive discrimination against her in male-dominated world, served to make the mother-daughter bond a close, tender and poignant one. I suggest further, that at the very least a shared experience of discrimination made mothers sympathetic to their daughters' marital problems. The mothers prioritised their daughters' wellbeing over anything else. A mother's protection reached far. Raja[85] who was alone struggling with continually worsening harassment by her husband and his mistress narrated how she succeeded in going to her mother's tomb on first anniversary of the mother's death. She described her feelings towards her mother at the moment of desperation and how her mother, although dead, helped her through *"a miracle"* which reinstated her contact with her brothers:

> As soon as I saw my mother's tomb I became very emotional. I felt as if my mother had come alive. I started crying very loudly saying I had to undergo all these problems because my mother had left me alone on this earth. I was asking my mother, why she left me alone and went away and now I did not have anybody to share my feelings with. I was telling my mother that she had brought me up very well just to give me to somebody to harass me. I was crying very loudly. Then I can only say a miracle happened. My brother and sister-in-law also came to the graveyard. My sister-in-law came and stood near me. Then they asked me why I was crying? Whether my husband is looking after me well or not? My brother said that, before my mother died, she was thinking only about me. I should go home [to her brother's home] and light a candle. ... Later, we came home and lit the candle and also offered food to my mother. We also prayed to my mother. All my sisters and brothers were there. Looking at them I could not control myself and I started crying and told everything.

Those women who did not have their families' support, approached authorities such as the police or the women's organisations in order to get help for their serious marital problems. Thus, the woman could show her husband the seriousness of the matter, her own competence and her institutional support. On the other hand, the husband or his family felt insulted – and sometimes scared – because the woman had made their *"family matter"* public by making complaints about his/their

[85] C, 27, m, s/u, 0c.

misbehaviour or dowry harassment. This complicated the matter and could even become the final straw for the marital break up.

All women suffered from enormous stress due to the serious problems they faced in their marriages. The poorer the women and the lesser the supportive persons they had, the more desperate they were. From the women's point of view the husbands were always considered as fault for the marital breakdown. However, for each marriage the circumstances and events leading to the final break up were unique. Due to the multiple marital problems described in this chapter from the women's point of view, transactions of marital love – the sharing and exchanges of material and immaterial substances such as food, money, goods, services and sex – that usually strengthen the bond between the husband and wife were diminishing or the counter part of the transactions had changed. Conflicting bonds and contested loyalties culminated on a precise day when *"everything was over"* as many of the women mentioned. The woman's affinal home and house was a main scene of the course of events as it represented the marriage – leaving the house or losing the chance of returning to it meant cutting the marital bond in practice. Importantly, the affinal house was the most important property which the couple had gained during their marital life if they were not living with their parents. It was built, bought or rented with a deposit during their marital life and the wife had also invested in it – if not materially at least symbolically. Usually both husband and wife needed and wanted the house. Moreover, it was a home of their potential children and thus by leaving the house one left also the children behind and lost the priority position with regard to them.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe how leaving a house and breaking the marital bond took place depending on the circumstances of the final step and how that influenced the each woman's bonds, self-representations and self-construction as a relational person after the marital breakdown as well as her concrete living situation. How the flows of wealth – money, property and dowry – move along with the leaving of the house and marriage?

"Then it was over"

The Husband's Initiative

Despite the serious marital problems the women faced in their marriages, in more than half of the cases (30 out of 52) it was the husband's initia-

tive to finally end the marriage: he left the house (19 out of 30) or did not call or bring the wife back from her natal home where she was on visit (7 out of 30) or he forced the wife out of the house (4 out of 30) (see table 3.1). As a matter of fact, this is in contrast to the research findings of studies of western world where women usually first suggest divorce or separation despite the financial and social hardship faced after divorce (e.g. Brinig and Allen 2000, 126-127; Amato and Previti 2003, 603) but is consistent with the study of Indian divorced women by Rao and Sekhar (2002). In it, the majority of men proposed divorce and separation whereas the majority of women proposed reconciliation (ibid., 550, 557).

Table 3.1: The Initiative of Marital Breakdown
(Two women had two marital breakdowns, therefore N=52)

Wife leaves the house	18	Husband leaves the house	19
Wife did not return from her natal home	3	Husband did not bring/ call his wife back from her natal home	7
Wife asks her husband to leave the house	1	Husband cheats/throws his wife out of the house	4
Wife's initiative, total	**22 (N=52)**	**Husband's initiative, total**	**30 (N=52)**

When a husband left the marital home, the couple was not usually living with the husband's family but separately. It was a shock for the woman even though serious problems had preceded it. For example, Hemalatha's[86] husband's negligence, violence and extra-marital relationships had increased gradually. One day her husband broke the windows of her house, which was her pride and joy: *"Everyone in the neighbourhood was looking at him. All the people living in rented houses, people walking on the road were standing and watching, thinking,' what is happening to my house.' Then, after breaking the windows he opened the door and had lunch."* Two months later, he hit Hemalatha, stole 20 000 rupees that a neighbour

[86] H, 30, u, d/j-, 0c.

had given for Hemalatha's safekeeping and eventually left. Earlier he had taken silver items and other valuables from the house as well as his clothes to his hide away. The husbands seldom left with empty hands. Many women said *"he took what he wanted",* usually meaning valuables and other things that he had provided for the house but also items such as pillow covers or towels, which the women mentioned with a special tone to indicate his *'smallness'.* Some husbands also took the women's personal things, gifts or valuables, which the women found particularly insulting. One day Lalithamma[87] came home from the office to find the whole house empty. In many cases, the house itself became an object for the ongoing battle.

Some husbands (7) refused to take their wives back from their natal homes they were visiting. As mentioned earlier, South Indian women visit their natal homes regularly and usually go there for the delivery of their first child or children (e.g. Srinivas 1999, 142; Säävälä 1997, 109; Dhuruvarajan 1989, 81-89). In these cases, the couple had lived with the husband's natal family and the husband's mother or sister supported the husband's plan of desertion or it could even have been their idea. This too was a shock for the women and their families as a child, was supposed to improve a wife's position in her affinal family (see earlier). For example, Aisa[88] who did not get along with her husband's sister recalled how her husband made her stay with her parents for four months longer than planned after the delivery. When the husband, along with his sister, finally came, instead of Aisa, he wanted to take the diamond necklace (worth 60 000 rs) which the husband's family had given to Aisa in their marriage ceremony in order to provide a water supply for the use of the baby. She recalled,

> This way on 2nd February they took the necklace from me and on the 14th February, that is, on Valentine's Day they sent me divorce papers. ... He had mentioned that he had come to take me and I did not turn up. So he wanted to discharge the marriage. ... He had written that he would take talaak from me and he had written Talaak, Talaak, and Talaak three times.

[87] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.
[88] M, 26, m, d/c, 1c.

Some women were encouraged to visit their parents and to leave their jewellery, even the *tali* in the case of Shabana[89] and when they were at their natal homes they were asked to stay there by a phone call from their husbands or in-laws. In a couple of cases, the husband ended the marriage directly after marriage ceremony, before marital life had even started. For example, Elisabeth[90]'s husband and his sisters they did not take Elisabeth with them from her natal home after the marriage ceremony as they were supposed to do according to custom. After a one-month silence they agreed to take her if she brought 25 000 rupees with her to the affinal home. Four husbands cheated or forced their wives out of the house and kept the children. For example, one woman was called to a police station to hear that her husband had made a police complaint against her, stating that she had a *"loose character"* and that she did not take care of him. Police insisted that she make *"some other arrangements*" as her husband refused to take her back home.

The Wife's Initiative

Less than half of the women (22 out of 52), took the initiative in the final breakdown of their marriage (see table 3.1.). They either left their affinal home (18 out of 22) or did not return from their visit with their natal family (3 out of 22). One woman asked her husband to leave the house she owned. When the women initiated the marital breakdown, they did this after considering the decision for a long time or they ran away in fear of one's life. As the marital problems increased, the women prepared themselves for departure, their *"coming out"* of marriage: they looked for a job, waited until their sisters got married and the children grew older, they planned for a place where they would go and a couple of women found themselves boyfriends. Many women said that the leaving was their last alternative to suicide or being killed by their husbands. The women with supportive parents asked for their backing in their plan to leave the abusive husband. The required extra encouragement came from a newspaper article, or a women's organisation leaflet or from television. The last straw was often the husband's violent act, his false accusations about the woman's character or presumed relationships, the mother-in-law's insults, or serious threats directed towards the woman's natal family members. The women who had children often said that the last straw

[89] H, 31, u, d/j-, 1c.

[90] C, 42, m, s/u, 0c.

was when they realized how much their children suffered from their husbands' behaviour. For example, Manjula's[91] 10-year old son became reserved and depressed after Manjula's husband beat him when he refused to bring him wine from a shop. The son's teacher asked Manjula about his changed behaviour. *"After that incident I realised that if I supported my husband's behaviour he would spoil the children's lives as well as mine. So decided to dispose of this bad insect, decided to get rid of the mad monkey,"* she described, showing her disgust at her ex-husband by calling him names. Whether a woman took her children with her or left them behind, she did it after thinking of what is best for her children. Sometimes the women felt so unsure about their future that they thought taking the children would spoil the children's lives.

Another way a woman could end her marriage was to not return from their stay at the home of their natal family, or with a sister in one case. Usually the woman had become sick in her affinal home and her mother had brought her to her natal home in order to get better. Once she was back with her parents, she told them about her marital problems, felt rescued and decided never to return to her affinal home. Whether the parents supported her decision or wanted her to reconsider it, both the woman and her parents emphasized that it was the woman's *"own decision"*.

Nearly half of the women who left their affinal homes returned to their natal homes, at least for a while. Others rented their own separate house or approached a women's organisation or help-line in order to find a temporary place to stay. One woman went to stay with her sister and another to stay with her friend. In most of the cases the husbands would have allowed their wives to come back. However, they were not ready to change anything in their behaviour (e.g. to leave another woman) or living situation (e.g. to move to a separate house, if the mother-in-law was an issue with the wife). Sometimes the husband suggested that his wife could return *"as a servant but not as a wife"*. Thus, even at this point the husbands seemed to consider that they were still in a position to make conditions and they were surprised when the women did not agree with them.

Due to the different ways of ending a marriage, the women faced different life situations after the marital breakdown regarding housing, a job, the children, parental support etc. In addition, the woman's trau-

[91] H, 43, m, d/j, 2c

matic state depended on her preparedness and her degree of initiative in the marital breakdown. For example, the women who were not called back to their affinal homes from their visit with their natal family were the most shocked by the marital breakdown whereas the women who left their husbands were often left in deprivation as some of them did not have a house, money nor their children with them but they had somehow prepared themselves for leaving and it was their firm decision to end the marriage.

Conclusions: Uncovering Gender Hierarchies

All women considered and presented themselves as wives for as long as they lived with the husbands, however, the failure or success in creating or strengthening the bond between the husband and wife – through marriage, the first night, the marital life, the birth of a child – shaped the gendered transformation of wifehood. The women who went through all these steps, even fulfilling their wifely devotion of becoming mothers, did each certainly consider themselves as more of as wife than those who were left before their marriage was even consummated. Furthermore, once they were mothers, their "womanhood" was no longer solely dependent on their wifehood: although wifehood was a necessity for them in order to become mothers and motherhood completed their wifely transformation, thanks to their having children, these women now also had additional, fundamental bonds created and maintained through transactions as well as additional – also gendered and elementary – self-representation as "mother". On the other hand, the wives of love marriages gave up their other important bonds as daughters and members of their natal families and concentrated fully on cultivating their marital bonds through transactions with their husbands. Consequently, they experienced and expressed the loosening of their marital bond even more acutely than the women of the arranged marriages. Thus, the intensity of transactions and concentration on the marital bond above the other bonds influenced a woman's self-representation and self-construction as a'wife'.

It seems that as relational persons, women need other persons for fundamental transactions and that need is essential for the construction of their gender – their womanhood – as daughters, wives and mothers even more than it is for their husbands – for men the gendering of men as well as their sexual potency is considered more automatic (see also Chapter

2). This, I suggest, accounts for the gender hierarchy between men and women. Additionally, the husbands' presumed superiority even after the departure of their wives that – she could return *"as a servant not as a wife"* – as well as the wives' higher threshold for leaving the marital home and the greater chance of getting killed in the marriage by her husband or by suicide – emphasise the prevailing hierarchical positions in marriage and the women's greater dependency on marriage and the husband (see also Gough 1997, 167; Sharma 1986, 190-191; Srinivas 1999, 153). Moreover, flows of money and wealth support this notion of inequality and uncover gender hierarchies embedded in the marriage system. At its worst, men and/or their families used the opportunities to cash in on the women's side both while making and breaking the marriage. Consequently, the husbands never left marriage and home empty-handed. Moreover, once he was out of house, he sought to recapture it sooner or later. On the other hand, the women left empty handed or they were left in an emptied house. Once they left the house they did not even dream of possessing it later for themselves. Nevertheless, they tried to get back their personal property or their potential dowry, at least their jewellery, when the situation later calmed down. Moreover, the women also opposed their husbands by words and acts, by seeking help and some, finally, by leaving their husbands. Thus, they challenged the male domination and the gender hierarchies taken for granted and manifested in this chapter – a tendency that becomes further highlighted in their lives after the marital breakdown and that will be emphasised more in the following parts of this study. Yet, as Gordon (1993, 142) points out regarding battered women, the concepts of agency and resistance do not mean victory nor should they work to soften the painful history of victimization. However, although many forms of resistance are probably poor choices, the impulse to do something is preferable to resignation (ibid.). In the following chapter, I will more carefully look at how the divorced and separated women's agency was developed and acted out during their crises following the marital break-up. I will also seek to answer the question of how the women's self-representations and self-constructions as relational persons of South India were constructed through interaction and sharing and how their transformations into 'the divorced and separated women' simultaneously took place.

Moreover, I suggest that the 'fluidity' and the 'permeable' quality of a woman (Busby 1997a; Daniel 1984; Fruzzetti et al. 1992; Trawick 1990, 133; Säävälä 2001, 105) that is assumed to facilitate her to go through

transformation at the stage of marriage, helps her to cope when this transformation is failing and, particularly, later to construct alternative self-representations. This supports the idea of flexibility of persons' self-constructions that will be explored further on in the following chapter, which deals with the women's crises, their recovering and their construction of self and self-representations after the marital breakdown.

4. "HOMELESS" WOMEN

Crises and Transitory phase

Kamala[92] is standing in front of the officer's desk in a centre of women's help line, which is situated in the same compound with the police station in Bangalore. Kamala is smiling and trying to catch the eyes of the officer. The officer does not look up. She is busy writing a report about calls and visits of "women in trouble", who are seeking help and queuing up for an appointment with a counsellor. Finally Kamala asks something from the officer. With one gesture the officer tells Kamala to wait patiently – there are others who had come before her. The officer does not ask Kamala to sit down and Kamala is looking around embarrassed.

As usual, the main office room, the corridor as well as the steps outside the office building of women's help centre are crowded with dozens of waiting women, children and some men. The family counsellors, professionals and volunteers, are walking around and shouting to each other: who is willing to go to which small room with which clients. Some women are crying silently, others aloud. One hears a wide range of personal stories – blaming, advising, enquiring and fighting – while waiting for one's own turn. Sometimes a whole family is packed into a one tiny room with the counsellor. Many disputes are going on simultaneously; voices are being raised and lowered. If a family fight goes too far accusations become too aggressive or acts become too violent, uniformed policemen will rush into the office.

[92] C, 39, m, s/u, 3c.

In late afternoon, Kamala, along with myself and Vijayalaksmi, my research assistant, is directed to one of the small counselling room. The officer has told Kamala about my research. She is willing to *"co-operate"* and tell me her story. However, she is tired, she hasn't had lunch and she should already be at home with her three teenaged daughters. She agrees when we suggest a meeting at my or her place instead of the office of the women's helpline. *"You can come to my home,"* she suggests.

A dog starts to bark furiously when we try to open's Kamala's gate the following day, at noon. Kamala is boiling water with her daughters in the lush and well-kept garden, with its roses, fruit trees and coconut palm. The hall of the house, where Kamala leads us, is empty, except for the small table and the "show case" full of religious posters and statues of Mother Mary, Infant Jesus and Saint Anthony. Kamala is a Christian but she was married to a Hindu man through an arranged marriage. She starts to narrate her life story, starting from her happy childhood memories in the village of Tamil Nadu.

Marriage brought problems to Kamala's life. According to Kamala, her husband wanted to have other relationships throughout their nearly 20 years of married life. Kamala was hurt by the way he ignored his three daughters. Despite the husband's fairly good salary, earned by factory work, there was a constant lack of money for food and school fees because the husband spent his salary with and on the other women. Kamala placed lot of importance on the girls' education and they themselves enjoyed their schooling. Finally, three years ago, the husband took a second wife and he tried to enter the house with his new wife but Kamala stopped them by threatening to pour kerosine on the husband and burn him (see earlier). *"Everything was over on that day on September 4th, 1997 itself. Afterwards I haven't talked to him."*

Kamala's husband emptied their house. He took the colour television, the music system, the ration cards and the towels, all the things he wanted. He discontinued the family insurance paid by his employer so that Kamala is not able to pay for the medicine she needs. Then he applied for voluntary retirement to prevent Kamala's from getting maintenance and now he is trying to drive Kamala and her daughters out of the house. That is Kamala's main concern. Moreover, they need more money for living, the daughters' education and, also, for the eldest daughter's marriage. Now they are living on one daughter's salary, which is 500 rupees a month. According to Kamala, she is not able to get a job as she

is an uneducated, middle aged woman. During the past three years, she has approached her brothers, relatives, community leaders, the women's organisation, the Family Court and now the women's helpline for help – in need of money and to secure her right to live in their house.

More than five hours later we are still sitting and talking in the hall. Kamala is crying. *"I am so helpless,"* she says again and again.

> I have not even brought a new dress for any of daughters for more than three years. When it has become so difficult to buy food how can I afford to by them dresses. I feel very helpless. I don't have any property. I have not even arranged anything for my daughter's marriage…. Wherever I go people listen to my problems to pass the time. Yesterday I felt very bad about what happened there…. The officer said, that my husband had deserted me because I am so slow or not active. At that point I felt very bad. People don't understand our problems. When I can't get justice anywhere my husband gets the encouragement to harass us more. ... Even God has no eyes. God has become stone. Today is Friday and we are all fasting. Even then God has closed his eyes to us. Instead of living like this, it is better to die (she is crying).

Kamala, as well as the other women who were at the peak of the crises, repeated how helpless they felt. Yet, helpless did not mean passive. On the contrary, Kamala was seeking help and some kind of *"permanent solution"*, stability, for her life. Moreover, she wanted *"some justice."* After the marital breakdown Kamala had first tried more traditional ways of solving her problems with the help of family members and community elders. Then she had entered into the completely new and confusing framework of NGOs, police and the Family Court. However, she did not want to miss any opportunity for help. From me she asked for advice although I had begun our meeting by introducing myself as "only an anthropologist" who could not provide her with anything else but a chance to talk. She had not given up, although she did experience moments of deep frustrations portrayed above.

The above description of Kamala's daily life and problems introduces the themes of this chapter. I will look at crises – the phase of "transitory" – and the divorced and separated women's efforts in order to overcome it by creating stability through social relations, a house and money. I will also explore how these efforts and their results lead to changes in the

women's self-representations and self-constructions as relational persons in South India.

Amato (1994, 215-216) who compared the impact of divorce on men and women in India and in United Stated points out that Indian women are under extreme stress following marital disruption due to the stigma, loneliness, poverty and uncertainty of their own and their children's future – many suffer from depression, thoughts of suicide, sleep disorders and other psychological symptoms (see also Mehrotra 2003; 173; Devi 1998; 114-115; Rao and Sekhar 2002, 557, Krishnakumari 1987). Among the divorced and separated women the peak of stress usually took place soon after the marital breakdown. Marital breakdown establishes discontinuities as well as reproduces continuities in social relationships (Simpson 1998, 33) which are often combined with material insecurity and consequently serious stress, which leads relational persons into a state of crisis. As Hoff (1990, 68) notes, crisis in its clinical meaning refers to the sudden onset and brief duration of acute emotional upset in response to identifiable traumatic life events with an accompanying difficulty in problem-solving. People need both material, social and cultural support to positively resolve their crises, characterized by growth and development, instead of negative self-destructiveness and mental disturbance (ibid., 68). The social position of the women influenced the depth of their crises. Although the poorest divorced and separated women faced the most severe hardship in order to survive after the marital breakdown, it was not a radical change to their earlier life situation (see Chapters 2 and 3) whereas for some of the middle and upper women the uncertainty of livelihood and lack of social relations was a drastic change to their previous life situations, which only deepened their experience of crisis. This kind of acute crisis can be compared with "life crises", i.e. human development transition states that both anthropologists (e.g. Kimball 1960; Turner 1991; 1981) and psychoanalysts (e.g. Freud 1950; Erikson 1963) have studied over the years (see Hoff 1990, 166-183).

In anthropological terms, a life crisis refers to a highly significant, expected event or phase in the life cycle, marking one' s passage to a new social status, with accompanying changes in rights and duties (e.g. Kimball 1960; Van Gennep 1960). Traditionally such status changes are accompanied by rituals that are designed to assist the individual in fulfilling her/his new role expectations and to lessen the stress associated with these critical, yet, normal life events. Moreover, families and the

entire community are intensively involved in the rites of passage through life (ibid.). Good examples of such rites of passage in women's lives in India are puberty as well as the marriage rituals I have described earlier. Moreover, if a wife loses her husband by death, she performs the ritual to make her into a widow. At different stages of the ritual she gives up the signs of a married woman, i.e. bangles, *kumkum,* toe rings and colourful saris (e.g. Lamb 2000, 214-215; Wadley 1995, 99). When a woman's marriage breaks down she too enters into a totally new state of life and social status, yet there is no ritual to mark it. In contrast, the marital breakdown is a shameful event and, thus, better kept secret, if possible. Moreover, there is no symbolic or otherwise clearly marked position or social status, like widowhood, for a woman to enter. Lipman-Blumen (1977, ref. in Rao and Sekhar 2002, 557) stated that divorce is a life crisis which society does not promote, as a result of which social rituals marking divorce are largely absent. This leaves the divorced, separated or deserted women without socially meaningful and shared ritual means to adapt the situation.

As distinguished by Van Gennep in his classic work on rites of passage (1960, 11) the ceremonies associated with an individual's 'life-crises', i.e., the complete scheme of rites of passage includes three phases: separation, transition and incorporation. Later, Turner (1981; 1991) has focused on the middle part of rites of passage, the transitory or liminal period, where the change actually takes place. Turner (1981, 93-99; 1991, 94-97) points out that subjects in the liminal phase are no longer and not yet classified, they are "neither one thing nor another", they are "betwixt and between", and, accordingly, transitional beings or "liminal *personas*" are particularly polluting. Moreover, they are structurally, if not physically, "invisible" as the members of society see only what they expect to see and what they have been conditioned to see when they have learned the definition and classification of their culture (Turner 1981, 95). According to Turner (ibid., 98), a further structurally negative characteristic of transitional beings is that they have *nothing:* no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. Turner's picture of the liminal phase illustrates well the phase women enter when their marriages break down: they do not have a clear place and position either in a symbolic or practical manner. They become "homeless" persons. However, in contrast to the subjects of Turner (1981), these women do not even have any a new, well-defined

social and cultural position that would end their liminal phase – being a divorced or separated woman is a stigmatised position as such. Yet, these women seek to reach a position of some kind of "incorporation" and thus, move from homelessness to this more stable position during the stressful "transitory phase" following their marital breakdown.

Homelessness or the feeling of homelessness characterises the divorced and separated women's transitory phase. The women's crises and homelessness lead us to explore different aspects of their relational personhoods. Marital breakdown makes them "kinless" – unrelated from their husbands and, in addition, often from other fundamental relationships as well. It illustrates that these "relational persons" are also "individuals" but these concepts are not mutually exclusive in South India, as suggested by Mines (1994, 20). According to Mines (1994) who investigated community and individuality in Tamil Nadu, while Tamil individuality is defined partly in terms of the private self, it is also always defined partly in terms of social contexts which distinguish the person in terms of his or her social relationships. Moreover, the private and the public are intermixed aspects of one's individuality and the individuality finds it expression within the context of social groups (ibid., 20, 189).[93] In addition, Parish (1994, 128) who explores "the web of relatedness" among Hindu Newars of Nepal also notes that there are moments when social embeddedness is foregrounded in consciousness and action and other moments when individual choice and action are stressed. I suggest that crisis and homelessness are the critical moments for individual agency, for both "forced" and spontaneous actions. According to Parish (129), in contrast to American popular culture which seems to treat self-identity and interdependency as antithetical – you can "lose your identity" in relationships and "find yourself" by separating and distancing – the Newars in Nepal more likely "find themselves" in relationships and "lose themselves" by separating (see also Mines 1994, 182). Following this logic, after a marital breakdown, during the stressful transitory phase, the women are both losing themselves while separating and, later finding themselves through relationships while recovering. The breakdown of marriage sets in train profound changes in the way that people express

[93] According to Mines (1994, 21-23) Tamil concept of individuality *(tanittuvam)* is a contextualized individual and Tamil individuality is spatially defined individuality, individuality of inequality and, finally, it has a private or interior dimension as well as exterior or civic dimension. Thus, according to Mines (ibid), South Indians do conceptualize and value individuality but *differently* from the Western mind (ibid. 9).

their relationships with one another, thus, the relationships and the sense of personhood they imply have to be renegotiated in radically new ways during the transitory phase, the phase of crises (see also Simpson 1998, 126). In this chapter, I will look at the making of a new "constructed" person. I will examine how the divorced and separated women's self-representations and relational personhoods were transforming and how their agency and "individuality" were developing, both during the crisis and "the transitory phase".

After the marital breakdown the very least that all women need is a place to stay, money for living, social relations and support in order to, initially, get over their acute crises and, then later – after getting their dowry and property back and giving up their hopes of reunion – in order to move out from the transitory phase. The length of the divorced and separated women's crises and transitory phase varied from one year to several years. The women who were still deeply caught up by their crisis could yet hardly envision any way out of it. Although the needs of house and money are material and practical, they also have a great symbolic meaning. The women always interpreted my question about "help" to indicate money. *"Money means everything"* was most common answer to my question about the meaning of money in their lives: with money the people are able to gain not only food and a roof but also contact to the children or relatives, respect and prestige, and so a form of self-dignity. A house and money manifest security and relatedness. They are a place of and a tool for interaction, sharing, and social support. In the following sections, I will look at how the women struggled and succeeded in order to get out the "homelessness" and transitory phases by creating stability by means of a home, money and social relations; and by seeking justice. I will explore how the women's success or failure to overcome their crises influenced their self-representations and "relational" personhood and how the women's "relationality" was acted out as well as renegotiated during the transitory phase through interaction or through the lack of it.

Seeking Stability and Justice

Grateful for Parents

Nearly half of the women (23 out of 52) initially returned to their natal homes or were not asked back to their affinal homes from there. Usually the women who returned to their natal homes had been married for a relatively short time.[94] Five of them had a child/children.

According to the cultural expectations, the parents are not "obliged" to maintain and take care of their daughter once they had fulfilled their *dharma*, the duty of arranging her marriage, including any potential dowry. Their main responsibility toward their daughter is then complete (see also Amato 1994, 211; Devi 1998, 91). Although the daughter is welcome to visit her natal home in South India (e.g. Dhuruvarajan 1989, 81; Nishimura 1998, 113; Srinivas 1999, 142; Säävälä 2001, 142-144) and to deliver her children there (e.g. Srinivas 1999, 142; Säävälä 1997, 109; Dhuruvarajan 1989, 89), she is not supposed to *live* there anymore. Thus, the opening the natal home to their once-married daughter was proof of parental love and a manifestation of a re-activated parents-daughter bond. Many parents of the divorced and separated women supported them in all ways they could during the crises which followed the marital breakdown, even the poorer parents who had to struggle for daily survival (cf. Amato 1994, 211) as well as the upper-middle class parents of the traditional communities parents who had to face complaints about it from their community (see more in Chapter 6). Again, the importance of the mother and a strong and intimate bond between a mother and a daughter (Busby 1997a, 36-37; Srinivas 1999, 141-143; Trawick 1990, 163-170) was often emphasised in the women's narrations as well as in their everyday practices during the crisis phase. "*My mother is the only person who cared for us [she and her children]. She earned money by work-*

[94] The women whose marriage had lasted longer, around ten years, usually continued to stay in their affinal homes with the children or sought independent living places, although a few of them used their natal home as their temporary refuge first. "When you are forty, you cannot go back to your mother anymore," one woman, already a grandmother herself, explained to me. Studies on divorced and separated women in India show that most women turn to their parents (or siblings) for accommodation and economic assistance, at least initially (Rao and Sekhar 2002, 551; Amato 1994, 211;Choudhary 1988, 123; Devi 1998, 91; Pothen 1987).

ing hard and maintained us. Because of my mother and because of her care and affection we are still alive," Sayabiran[95] recollected.

At least in the beginning, the mother of the separated or divorced woman, took care of the household tasks, and her father, the family's livelihood. As the women's basic needs of home, money, and social relations and support were fulfilled, it helped them to recover from the most acute crisis. They had the energy to search for a job or further education or to start to the court process in order to get a divorce, alimony or maintenance which all helped them to create new positions and to move out from the transitory phase. The key role women's parents play in recovery of the divorced or separated women is also noted elsewhere. For example, Devi's (1998, 91) study on the socio-psychological problems of divorced women in India argues that "the future of divorced women depends very much on how they are received by their families and what support their families are prepared to give them."

On the other hand, the crises of marital breakdown and its severe consequences spread into the natal family through everyday transactions and sharing while the woman was living there. For example, some parents got high blood pressure and one parent even had a heart attack, some tried to commit suicide, one mother became diabetic and another father started drinking heavily and got depressed. Moreover, a woman's returning home harmed her siblings' chances of getting married, causing extra stress to everyone in the house (see Chapter 6).

On behalf of the Children

The women who continued to live with their children in their affinal home (18 out of 52) after the marital breakdowns were deeply worried about their children's future without a father.[96] It caused them enormous stress during the transitory phase.[97] On the other hand, their "duty" as

[95] M, ~36, p, s/u, 4c (one died).

[96] As shown earlier, the divorced and separated women's bond to their children or child was under strong pressure due to the marital breakdown and some women (10) were even forced to leave their children behind.

[97] Also according to Amato's (1994, 215) study on the impact of divorce, rearing children is a major source of stress for many Indian women after marital disruption. They worry a great deal about their children's future. According to Mehrothra (2003, 173), single mothers focus on surviving – housing, finance, food and other necessities – and invest enormous energy, specially in the early years, in creating physical as well as emotional stability.

mother made them give up their ideas of committing suicide, helped them to stop mourning and pushed them to go to work or to start looking for a job (see Chapter 7). Moreover, those children who were already grown-up turned out to be their mothers' strongest support and the providers of the whole family. Some elder sons defended their mothers against the abusive ex-husbands but also the elder daughters treated their mothers protectively. For example, Kamala's daughters advised her to stay at home instead of her frustrating struggle for outside help but Kamala did not want to give up as she thought it was her only way to help her daughters. All in all, a child or children gave sense of permanency for the women in the transitory phase when everything else was shattering around them.

The affinal home and house had great symbolic and material value for the divorced and separated women: it gave them or it would give them the required shelter and stability. However, some women's ex-husbands wanted to capture the house for themselves. The women considered that it was their *"right"* to continue living in their affinal homes because they had not done anything wrong. Often they found out that law also says so.[98] Thus, some women approached women's organisations or the Family Court in order to secure this right. Meanwhile, the husbands employed crooked measures to get their wives out of the house, for example, by claming to the police that the woman was having *"a loose character"*. Usually the police checked the situation without taking action but in a couple of cases the husbands finally succeeded in reclaiming the house (see Chapter 7). If the woman lost the house her position became more unstable and she got deeply stuck in the transitory phase. On the contrary, if the woman succeeded in keeping the house, it gave her stability, confidence and strength to struggle for other things such as job, money, divorce or maintenance in order to move out from the transitory phase.

The day the woman finally started her training course or found a job because she had *"mouths to feed"*, gave new direction to her recovery. The first salary day was considered as a triumph and remembered with warmth. It manifested and strengthened the women's new social role and position and, even, an ending of the transitory phase. One woman do-

[98] Under Hindu law, although there is no express provision which ensures the right of a wife to reside in the matrimonial home, it can be inferred from section 18 of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956. Despite the lack of guarantee, the majority of Indian courts have concluded that a wife has the right to occupy the matrimonial home and even to exclude her husband in certain situations (Sharma 1994, 247-251).

nated her first salary to a temple, but most of the women bought new dresses for their children. Thus, the first "own money" was used on behalf of those others in whom a woman wanted to invest or show her love. Later some women commented proudly and confidently that whatever the hardships they endured *"they did not let their children suffer"*. One woman emphasized how she used to breast-feed her son although she was forced to visit the Family Court continuously, and another woman stressed how she managed to educate not only herself and her children but also her younger sisters and brothers. With a pleasant voice and smile, Lalithamma recalled as follows,

> The period [after the marital breakdown] between 1991 and 1995 was very difficult. I still don't understand how I managed with my children and my home. ... I started helping myself. ... People also supported and encouraged me. They used to say that it is difficult for them to manage even with one child and I, being a single mother, have managed to bring up four children. In that way I am proud of myself. When I think how much I have struggled to bring them up. Now my children are grown up, so, I feel free and there is some satisfaction. This is also because of god's grace. And my brother and friends helped financially whenever I wanted.

Alone

For the women (8 out of 52), who had lost both of their natal as well as affinal homes and families in the most concrete terms, this period was the most traumatic and critical. Being alone was an extremely humiliating experience and an anomalous state of affairs. The women's homelessness correlated with the feelings of loneliness, bondlessness and lovelessness – they did not belong anywhere. Tarak[99] commented sadly that throughout her life she had not experienced love from her parents, husband nor children. *"Usually at least one of them is good but in my case none of them was good, loving or supporting."* The women (10) who had felt too unsure about the future and had left their children behind considered it as the biggest sacrifice they had made in their lives. Moreover, some of these women had left all their clothes and jewellery to their affinal home as they had left hastily. Those lost clothes and jewellery further marked their loss of the stable status of being a married women (see

[99] H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c.

earlier, Turner 1981, 98). According to the homeless women, the most important thing was to find a permanent place to stay because without a home and its' relationships, some people treated them as if they were *"loose"* in relation to their *"character"* or not be taken seriously.[100] A permanent living place would give stability to their situation, at least bind them to some place, although a woman living alone would not fit either to any cultural categories.

The woman's social status and economic position influenced her ways of seeking a place to live and "first aid". A few upper middle-class women, who had a job and money, sought their rental flats through newspaper advertisements. Their strategy was to talk about their misery of being deserted and to gain the sympathy of the landlady. Friends and colleagues helped upper middle class women, whereas neighbours were a great support to the poorest women who were living in the slum areas. Those women, whose social status was somewhere between the two, sought help from women's organisations. The poorest women did not contact them as they did not expect that any outsider would help them. On the other hand, Savitri[101], an upper middle class woman, expressed her frustration on behalf of her *"standard of women"* when she said: they do not have any place to go as all the hostels and short stay homes are targeted for the women of the lower social strata and that going to such a place would be simply too humiliating. She was lucky to have a good friend who had promised her that she could stay with her if she walked out of her marriage. Years later, another upper middle class woman, Sheela[102], remembered her homeless-period and the need of home as follows:

> If they [divorced or separated women] are from a good family, they are not prepared to live in a slum. … I was living a life of a gypsy; living there, living here. I used to go and live with complete strangers because I did not have a roof. I have gone and lived in many places. Where you go after the divorce is a very important question, which they [women's organisations] do not settle. They only want the laws to be changed to make divorce easier. That

[100] When I came to India for my first fieldwork in 1996, I could not start my work of interviewing and meeting women in the women's organisation until I had found a permanent place to stay and address, prefereably related to some research institute or college. "Here you must be related to other people or institutes, you must belong somewhere. You cannot just live and work alone," I was advised.

[101] H, 41, u, d/j, 0c.

[102] C, 54, m, d/j, 1c.

> does not solve the problem. ... I need a house. Nobody gives you a house if they know you are a single woman. Only if you are a professional such as an engineer, doctor or highly placed individual and you get divorced might you get a house. The main thing is a woman should be very qualified, she should have a lot of money once she is divorced.

For the single women, searching for a residence went together with searching for a job and/or pressurising the husband to pay some compensation or maintenance as they needed money for their living expenses. The more alone the woman was the more helpless she felt and, paradoxically, the more difficult it was for her to get support from women's organisations or from the police. According to the women, a woman who approached these institutions with her parents and a brother or even with the children was taken more seriously than a sole woman. Moreover, when the woman entered this network of "helping" institutions, her personal, unique crisis changed into a routine once she became one of the *"cases"*. Although in theory all the women were to be treated equally in women's organisations and by the police, in practice the institutions have limited resources and too many "women in distress" to help. In some cases, the women were shunted back and forth from one institution or organisation to another which all had their ways and principles through which the women were helped. In each place the women received some help and *"the case was settled",* but as the women were not fully satisfied, they approached another institution. Sometimes the women's and their "helpers'" views were in conflict which prolonged and complicated the process even more. It was also sometimes a matter of luck or dependent on personal and background qualities of a woman, such as her caste, religion or native region to successfully evoke the empathy of the workers of these institutions and to get one's case settled promptly and with sympathy. I witnessed how temporary as well as permanent residences and jobs were found through the networks of women's organisations and their personnel. The workers made potential landlords or employers feel as if they were benefactors and assured them of the *"good character"* of the *"deserted wife"*.

From the women's perspective, their lonely struggles to get practical help and find *"a permanent solution"* took *"too long"* as each day felt like a great effort. However, it often took a year if not years to solve their complex problems (see Chapter 5 for legal processes). Meanwhile, some women got deeply frustrated and disappointed – they could not get

"justice" even through the institutions. Consequently, they, like Kamala decided to give up on the institutions, at least for a while, and turn to God instead.

Turning to Religion

Kamala narrated:

> Because of money we have approached so many women organisations. Nowadays I am thinking about withdrawing my case. Instead of fighting against these kinds of people, it is nice to pray to God. Even though God had not given us luxurious food, at least, he has given us *ganji* [a simple nourishing drink made of ragi-flour]. ... In my situation anyone would have gone mad. Only because of God's grace I have survived. ... I am not worried. Somehow I feel that everything will go smoothly. I have stopped trusting human beings. I do not trust myself either. …Only God can shape my life and children's lives. Since I believe in the ultimate power I feel everything will go well and I feel strong.

Kamala, in particular, sought consolation from the Mother Mary and felt Mary's blessing and dispensation in her life. Because of Mary, she decided to convert herself and her daughters from Protestant to Catholic. They had already started praying classes that would lead to the ceremony of Baptism. As mentioned earlier, as a deity (Trawick 1996, 169) or as real, the mother is a protector and women are more likely to worship the goddess as a mother and seek refuge in her in that form. Tarak[103] also turned to the powerful Goddess Banashankari during the transitory phase. She went weekly to the Goddess Banashankari Temple to *"light a lamp", diipa*. [104] Women turned to Goddess Banashankari in particular for "their" problem of getting married or to have a child or son or to solve their marital problems, as Tarak did. The priest of the temple, *puzarii,* advised her to do a 16-week *puja* in the Banashankari Temple,

[103] H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c.

[104] I was told that Goddess Banashankari was created by male Gods for the purpose of destroying the too powerful saint Mahishasura who had been blessed by Shiva so that no God could destroy him. Thus, each God gave one part of himself and his strength to Goddess Banashankari who then succeeded to destroy the saint. Banashankari resembles to the *amman* goddesses such as Mariyamman in Tamil Nadu. These non-Sanskritic *amman*goddesses are too mothers but with powers to destroy as well as create (Hancock 1999, 133; general about Mother Goddesses see Subramaniam 1993 (ed.)).

every Tuesday, during *rahukala*-time[105] to get rid of the evil power that was in her way. Temples were usually closed during *rahukala*-time because it was considered a bad time to do *puja* or to start any auspicious work or new phase in life, not to mention marriage. However, in the Banashankari temple this rule was turned upside down. Women from all the corners of the Bangalore flew into the temple to be there during the *rahukala* for their 9 or 16 or 21 week *puja* in order to make their wish come true. I visited the temple when Tarak was *"lighting a lamp"* in her 12th week, during the monsoons.

Not minding the heavy rain, Tarak, has come to the temple a full five and an half hours before the *rahukala* to be the first in the queue of the hundreds of women. *"When I started 12 weeks ago I was last in the line but now I am the first,"* she says proudly. During the hours before the *rahukala* she has been mostly praying and reading religious literature but also talking to the other women in the queue. When the *rahukala* time came nearer, the women at the beginning of the queue started to sing, and when *rahukala* starts, gates are opened and all the women rush into the inner circle of the temple with their offerings: lighting lemons[106], yellow and red powder, rice, *jagary* made of sugar cane and few coins. Later, I see Tarak praying in the front of the temple in the heavy rain before she enters the priests' house to bring them offerings and speak with them for a while. Then Tarak is in a hurry as she needs to reach her hostel before dark. Moreover, she has not eaten anything since the day before and she is soaking wet – both of which are things that the Indians I knew used to avoid. However, she is very pleased with her day: she already feels that some progress is taking place and now she has only four more days to go.

Both Kamala and Tarak presented their prayers and increased religious activities as their *"last hope"* at a moment when they felt that everyone – family members, friends, women's organisations – had let them down. While they wanted to improve the situation, they made themselves part of the religious process in order to change themselves through conversion and by the extended *puja*-serial. They were to become like new persons by religious means. By praying to Mary and by converting herself from a Protestant to a Catholic, Kamala sought

[105] *Rahukala* lasts for one and an half hour everyday. It is fixed a time but differs according to weekdays.

[106] A half of the lemon was turned upside-down and filled with oil and a cotton heart of the light.

structural solutions and engaged herself in the holistic and hierarchical relations of Catholicism instead of the "individualism" embedded in protestant Christianity and its revival movement (see Robbins 2004). Kamala was accompanied by her daughters, and the whole process was directed at their well-being as well. Likewise, Tarak made herself part of the structural order and holistic-hierarchical relations of the temple, together with other women while they were simultaneously pursuing their "own" goals. Moreover, religious rituals could be interpreted as a way of dealing with the unexpected and undeserved miseries of life, such as marital breakdown. Also other divorced and separated women were doing *puja*-serials, praying or giving special promises to their god or gods in order to solve their problems and to get some hope, trust and *"inner peace"* at their confusing situation of the transitory phase. One promised to break a hundred coconuts in the temple of her natal place once her problems were over, and another, a Hindu woman, to become a Catholic nun because she was consoled by a priest at her most critical moment after the escape. Although all these promises were not necessarily fulfilled, through them the women maintained their religious relation to God or gods through the principle of reciprocity. On the other hand, some women gave up religious activities altogether because they did not lead to any improvement in their situation – the gods had also let them down. Or, the women's attitudes to religion kept on changing with their situations, like the examples of Kamala (cf. her earlier comment, *"Even God has no eyes. God has become stone*") and Hemalatha (see later) show.

In addition to a place to live, money to live, and social relations, the women also needed to free themselves from their husbands by getting their dowry and personal property back and by giving up their hopes of reunion in order to recover and to get out of the transitory phase. Moreover, getting the children back was essential for recovery.

The Recovery Begins

Getting Back

Getting back a dowry and a woman's personal property such as jewellery or clothing demonstrated that sharing and interaction between the couple as well as between the families was over: "everything" was over. After

the disappointment of marriage, getting back a dowry and other personal property became a question of "justice" and family honour. I heard many fathers and mothers commenting bitterly, *"they cheated us."* The woman's organisations or the police were often contacted because getting things back required a lot of negotiation.

Moreover, a dowry could become the woman's and her family's potential tool of pressure or even revenge in the conflict after a marital breakdown. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, problems with the mothers-in-law, the husbands' infidelity and other marital problems were often combined with dowry demands or harassment by the husband or his family, particularly, if the marriage had taken place relatively recently. The divorced and separated women were either aware of or became aware of the legislature prohibiting "dowry harassment" during their marital crises or after the marital breakdown.[107] Some women were each encouraged to make the dowry complaint against their husband by the women's organisation, the help centre advisor, or by the police or by their lawyer. The complaint was used or could be used as a strategy in order to show a husband the seriousness of the situation and woman's position in negotiations.[108] According to the women, their police complaint would

[107] Since the 1980's many proposed dowry related legal reforms were passed in order to punish cruelty against to a wife and to pay attention to the unnatural deaths of recently married women (see Chapter 2). In 1983, the Criminal Law (second amendment) Act was passed. It introduced section 498-A to the Indian Penal Code under which cruelty to a wife was made punishable by up to three years of imprisonment and a fine. Secondly, Section 113-A was added to the Indian Evidence Act (1872). It introduced a presumption of abetment to suicide if a married woman takes her own life within seven years of marriage and if there is evidence of cruel treatment from her husband or his family. Technically, this is called shifting the burden of proof, and thus it lessens the burden upon the complainant. Finally, the Act amended Section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Code, making a post mortem examination compulsory on the body of a woman who died within seven years of marriage (Kumar 1998, 115-126; Ghadially & Kumar 1988, 175-177; see also Desai & Krishnaraj 1990, 255-257; Gandhi and Shah 1993, 52-6; Kumari 1989a; Kumari 1989b). Later, in 1986, another section 304B was introduced into the Indian Penal Code (Jaising 2001 (ed.), 122-133). It provides that if a woman dies within seven years of marriage of burns or other injury or under suspicious circumstances and there is evidence that she had suffered abuse in connection with demands for A dowry from her husband or his relatives, the latter will be presumed to have been responsible for her death and be liable to imprisonment for a term of from seven years to life (ibid.; Mukhopadhyay 1998, 38-39). Further, women's organisations have been fighting against the custom of dowry by campaigns, protests and studies to awaken and increase public awareness.

[108] These sections 498A and 304B of the Indian Penal Code are also thought to encourage women to bring "false" complaints against their husbands and their in-laws, sometimes prompted by the women's organisations (Kusum 1993, 32-35; cf. Vatuk 2006, 218), however, the complaints I talk about here are not "false complaints".

not necessarily lead to actual sentencing, for example, imprisonment, but it would probably lead to a beating, a night or two in jail or the seizure of some property belonging to the wife by the police themselves.[109] Thus, it would stain the name of the husband and his family. As Shanti Devi's comment below shows, the possibility of a making dowry-complaint gave the women a feeling of the power to decide:

> I am going for a mutual consent divorce. ... Otherwise I would have filed a dowry case and made sure that he is inside (jail). I could have taken revenge in that way. Many people advised me to do so. Somehow I did not feel that, I do not have any intention of taking revenge.

By getting back their goods, house hold utensils, gold, money, site or any other items given as a dowry, women and their families felt that they got back a part of their lost honour. Leela[110] remembered the day when she brought back all the things from her husband's house, putting an end to their marriage by emphasising the power and control she had over the situation. It was not her shame, it was her decision to leave her husband and she got back whatever she wanted, *"even a single spoon"*, with the help of the women's organisation. Leela narrated:

> We had to hire a lorry because there was quite a lot of furniture. It was not a shame for me but it was a shame for him, because he had called all the neighbours (to witness). Everyone was telling me that why don't you give him a chance but I said no. That was the last day I saw him. We loaded everything into the lorry and brought the things home. Only because of the [the name of the organisation] and with [the name of the organisation], could I do that. ... This was my chance to make a claim.

After getting the dowry and other property back, the women's belief in "justice" increased and they got some confidence back and even feelings of empowerment.

[109] Sometimes police officers may propose this kind of "punishment" for the husband instead of proper legal procedures. Similarly, according to Vatuk's (2006, 217) study on domestic violence, the police are reluctant to file "first information reports" (FIR) in cases of domestic violence but prefer either to mete out their own punishment immediately or to extract an oral or written "undertaking "from the husband to behave better in future.

[110] H, 25, u, d/j, 0c.

Furthermore, some women who had left their children behind regretted it deeply once they had found themselves a proper place to stay and a job with which to earn a livelihood, in other words, once they had recovered from the most acute crises. They then wanted to re-establish contact with their children by visiting them at school or by obtaining visiting rights or the custody of the child or children through the court or with the help of the women's organisation. This important goal in life supported their recovery, although the latter process usually lasted for years. If these women nevertheless succeeded in becoming reunite with their child/children, it overshadowed their struggle because *"justice"* won in the end. Their position became more stable and respectable once they were living again with the child/children. For example, Ranjana[111], who had recently reunited with her children with the help of a woman's organisation, related how men used to stare at her and to make improper suggestions to her, so that she was scared and depressed to go. This stopped immediately once she had got her children back. Thus, the children protected the woman by binding her to the respectable position of mother: she was not alone or "loose" anymore.

Letting Go

The third of women who initiated the marital breakdown (7 out of 22) were under pressure because their husbands were not ready to let them go.[112] These women claimed that they faced credibility problems because their *"cunning husbands"* knew how to deceive people. For example, a family counsellor of the women's organisation believed Shanti Devi's[113] husband, who had serious mental problems and *"cried about everything. So she (the family counsellor) thought he is a very soft guy and I have made up all sorts of rotten things about him,"* Shanti Devi recalled. Only after she had made a police complaint because her husband had threatened her and her parents' lives did the counsellor believe her. Usually the disappointed husbands wanted their ex-wives to sign papers, letters or agreements to attest that the women had been treated well in the affinal home and that they had left of their *"own will"* or due to their *"character*". The women considered these untrue letters incredibly insulting and unfair and no would one sign them, not even if they were threatened by people on the side of the husband, for

[111] H, 31, l, s/u, 2c.

[112] The threatening ex-husband is a common problem of the "western" woman who has left her abusive husband (see e.g. Lahti 2001, 256).

[113] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.

example, by the dangerous *"crowdies"* who could harm them. However, the frightened women and their parents contacted either a woman's organisation or the police at this point at the latest.

On the other hand, despite the serious problems and humiliations of their marital lives, a fourth of the women (14 out of 52) still wanted to get back with their husbands (see table 4.1).[114] The comment below Raja[115] gave about her future after a long interview speaks for the attitudes of these women.

> If my husband comes back, I shall forgive him. I shall try to forget whatever bad things had happened to me. ... I shall try to adjust to him and live with him. ... I know it is not easy and I can not say it is possible. But my heart has not accepted it [the break-up] and I am still waiting for him. ... But if he does not come back, then I would like to do a computer course, to graduate. It may help me to get a better job with a better salary.

Table 4.1: The number of women who wanted to be reunited with the husband or who did not want a reunion with the husband after their marital breakdown, in year 2000/1996 (two of the women had two marital breakdowns and therefore N=52).

Women who wanted a reunion	10	Women who did not want a reunion	33
Women who wanted a reunion with some reservation	4	Women who did not want a reunion, with some reservation	5
Total	**14 (N=52)**	**Total**	**38 (N=52)**

Note for table 4.1: One of the women changed her mind during the year from wanting to do so to not wanting to reunite and one woman who did not want to reunite but did however then reunite and continue her marriage during that year. Further, five of the husbands were already dead by the end of the year 2000.

[114] In Kumari's (1989a, 20-21; 1989b) study on the victims of dowry-related cruelty, out of 50 cases only 16 women decided to move out on their own when they could not bear the torture any more. Out of them, only 3 women decided never to go back to their husbands while 13 of them went back, only to be later murdered (ibid.).

[115] C, 27, m, s/u, 0c.

In the same way that a woman usually remains hidden during the marriage negotiations, the women stayed at the background in the beginning of the re-union negotiations. The women asked other people – their fathers or brothers, uncles or other relatives, elders of the family or influential persons who had witnessed their marriage – to *"advise"* their husbands to come back. Then they could approach a woman's organisation or a counselling centre. Sometimes the police were contacted or the husband was forced into the counselling by being threatened with a police complaint. Finally, some women approached their husbands directly. They visited the husbands' workplaces or tried to appeal to their husbands' fatherly feelings by taking the children to court. However, for these husbands, avoiding one's wife also meant avoiding one's children – the children being the strongest manifestation of the intimate marital bond and transactions between the husband and wife – thereby giving no hope for reunion. Fatma[116] recalled how she went three times with her children to her husband's *"native place"* i.e., his place of birth, before finally giving up:

> The last time when we went he said that he didn't like me and wanted to marry somebody else. Now he is also planning to sell our house in Bangalore. ... Whenever I went to him he beat me. The last time I also got beaten up and my children were worried and cried. Now I don't have the money or strength to go back.

As the last resort, some women initiated court proceedings by applying for the "restitution of conjugal rights". The purpose of this legal remedy is to compel a spouse who has left the affinal home to return.[117] However, there is no mechanism to enforce restitution in practice. Later (see Chapter 5) I will explore further this process from the women's point of view.

The women were sincerely disappointed because they had believed in the negotiations, an age old tradition in which others, particularly, the members of one's kindred group (e.g. Trawick 1990, 180) could solve one's marital problems. Moreover, the women tended to overestimate the capabilities of the organisations or counselling centre to solve marital

[116] M, 35, p, s/u, 5c.

[117] See details of this act on Diwan (1998, 113-119) and the historical perspective on Chandra (1998).

problems according to the women's wishes. In practice, it turned out to be quite impossible to convince these husbands by any kind of negotiations or threats.[118] For a long time, sometimes years these women were hoping for reunion. They kept the wedding photos and the husband's photos hanging on the wall and they did not remove their *tali,* the sign of a married woman. However, just like Raja, they also started to envisage life without a husband which grew stronger as all efforts to bring about the husband's return failed.

The Turning Point

In her study of the battered women in the USA, Hoff (1993, 63) described the women's "moment of truth": the moment when the women's experiences with their spouses begin to appear as diametrically opposed to their views of what love, marriage and friendship should be and their marriage relationship is revealed to be characterized by the abuse of traditional male power, which may be followed by the intention to leave the violent relationship.[119] According to Denzin (1989, 70-71), these kinds of "epiphanies" appear in biographies: they are interactional moments and experiences, often moments of crisis, which leave a mark on people's lives. In them, personal character in manifested and they alter the fundamental meaning structure in a person's life (ibid.). Some of the divorced and separated women who had left their husbands – who *"changed"* and *"came out"* from their marriage – did experience turning points such as this "moment of truth" during their marriages. Nevertheless, it was far more common that the divorced and separated women experienced such a moment after they had first recovered from their most acute stress. Meanwhile the women had also got involved in some alternative transactions in their homes, in the women's organisations or while working or studying and their alternative visions of life had started to emerge from their acts and experiences during the crises and recovery period. I also witnessed

[118] I also witnessed this happen in the cases of Kiran and Elisabeth, the first after 2 years and the second after 4 years, see also Pushpa in Chapter 5). As this is a study of broken marriages, the successful reconciliations do not appear here. Rao and Sekhar's (2002, 548) study shows that 70 percent of the respondents experienced more that one separation before getting divorced, thus, they had also experienced reconciliations.

[119] See also Lahti (2001, 246-248) about the "awakenings" of Finnish women, i.e., the moments when they realized that they have to leave their abusive partners.

such turning points taking place during my fieldwork. Here I recall my experience with Hemalatha.

Our first meeting at the women's help centre, leads to a life-history interview in Hemalatha's home, in her neat and cosy hall (living room). Thirty-year-old Hemalatha narrates how badly her husband treated her right from the beginning of their marriage, 10 years ago. According to Hemalatha, her bus-driver husband was greedy for her property, continuously setting new dowry demands. Moreover, he was violent and *"a womaniser",* and yet, he acted like a hero because he married Hemalatha *"out of mercy"* although she was *"lame"* due to the polio she suffered as a young child (see earlier, Chapter 2). True, Hemalatha limps with one leg, but she is also well-educated, nice looking and from a good Hindu family. However, he subordinated all that to her *"lameness."* Finally he left her in a humiliating manner (see earlier, Chapter 3) more than one year ago. Despite open criticism towards her husband, Hemalatha tells me how she is still seeking a re-union with her husband by any means she can imagine – with the help of family members, the women's organisations, through the court process, where she is contesting her husband's divorce petition, by pursuing her husband herself, and now, through the women's help centre where we first met. Earlier she used to make visit temples and do the special *pujas* by praying and lighting a lamp in Banashankari temple every Friday for 16 weeks but then she gave up, *"My wish did not come true. So I do not want to do any pujas anymore. God has gone away"* (cf. earlier). Yet, she has not given up her view on Sita as an ideal for an Indian woman.[120] She explains to me,

> For Sita, Rama was everything after the marriage. Even the children were next. Once she respects her husband the she can get all name and fame. She can get everything through him. ... I would like to be like Sita. Even though she did not get anything, she got a very good name. That is enough, name and fame is enough in life. You don't need anything more than that.

[120] Sita is the heroine of the epic The Ramayana, the wife of Lord Rama, considered as the perfect ideal of wifely devotion which is tested most severely, for example, by the fire ordeal but she emerges still victorious even when abandoned by her husband to appease his subjects. Sita is considered as ideal of the chaste wife, faithful and dutifully obedient to her husband, even when abused by him (Jacobson 1978, 95-100; Wadley 1977, 122-124; Kakar 1994, 63-91; Kishwar 1997).

However, while narrating her future dreams, Hemalatha also has another option in her mind,

> I hope my husband will come back one day. Still I am dreaming. ... However, all these days I had been driver's wife. Now I want my own very good job in the computer field and I want to stand on my own feet. My parents have given me my education. I should not stop there. I want to learn and get more.

Five months later I try to reach Hemalatha first by phone and later I try to visit her with no success – she is never at home. Finally she gets my message and I am welcomed to visit her again but only on Sunday because all the other days she is too busy from morning till night: she is taking two computer courses simultaneously, one in the mornings and the other in the evenings. When we meet again only her neat home looks the same, or quite similar: her *puja*-room (home altar) is in use once again. *"Am I different now?"* Hemalatha asks me with a big smile, followed by cheerful laughter, being confident of my answer.

> When we met the first time I was so depressed but now I am so happy. I am so busy with my studies. When I come home I am so tired I simply sleep. Earlier I was at home all the time or I visited depressing places like the women's helpline and the Family Court. Sitting at home was the worst thing. People should go out and study, like I do. There you meet civilised, educated people, who treat you well and with whom it is easy to talk with.

She continues by making fun of her previous comments on Sita and on herself:

> I said earlier that women should be devoted to their husbands. Shit, I say now. Now I also think that if my husband wants to have a divorce, let him have it. In fact, I would not even live with him again if he did not improve his bad habits. It would be dangerous to live with such a man. Now I am ready for divorce.

This example shows a complex sense of self and the shifts in the way that Hemalatha presented herself to me; her multiple self-representations created through crises and recovering. During our first meeting Hemalatha

presented herself mainly as a deserted but devoted wife. Nevertheless, she also painted another kind of potential picture of herself (working and earning in the computer field) which was actually quite contradictory to the first self-representation (only name and fame account for a woman). In our meeting five months later, the alternative self-representation had become dominant and it had replaced the earlier one.[121] The example of Hemalatha leads us to look at how her as well as other divorced and separated women's socially related "individuality" developed through the achievement of responsibility that encompasses three related notions: agency, causation and social order, as elaborated on by Mines (1994, 179).

"Individuality" by Achieving Responsibility

Reconstructing Agency, Dharma and Social Order

According to Mines (1994, 179-183), responsibility and the achievement of responsibility is the important part of "individuality" of the South Indian people. This sense of responsibility encompass three related notions: (1) agency – the individual is an actor responsible for his or her actions, (2) causation – actions have consequences so that the decisions one makes and the actions one takes are believed in a very direct way to be the cause of how one's life turns out, and (3) social order – the more senior (and less subordinate) one is, the more control one has over one's life and the lives of the others (ibid.). Thus, the Indian responsibility implies not only the autonomy in the sense of control over decisions affecting one's life but also the responsibility the person assumes or seeks to have *for* others (ibid., 182). According to Mines (1994, 17-18) as adult Indians grew older, they increasingly expressed a very strong sense of personal responsibility for how their lives have turned out. Such a developed sense of self was the result of life's circumstances that compelled them to take charge and realize that they alone were responsible for they own lives (ibid., 18). I suggest that for many divorced and separated women the crises and the recovering following the marital breakdown were cru-

[121] It is worth noting that, Hemalatha was talking and presenting herself to *me* and her expressions would have been different if she had been talking to someone else, for example to her mother.

cial moments for developing their "relational" individuality through the achievement of responsibility. In the following sections, I will explore the emergence of their agency and how their alternative visions of causation, *dharma* and social order were articulated and acted out after the "turning point".

While searching for stability and justice the women, along with their families or friends or just by themselves, were pushed into new situations where they had to react in a new manner and to create contacts with the people and institutions that they used to avoid earlier. There woman needed to be more determined, convincing and "independent" than ever before. They were "forced" for mobility to get new stability into their lives. However, in some cases the women "agency" was at least partly imposed on them – they had become "actors" because they did not have any other alternatives in order to stay alive. The ensuing fights, created a lot of tension, a sense of helplessness and moments of deep disappointment. However, while solving the problems the women also got feelings of empowerment. Furthermore, while the women became disappointed with other people, their own efforts and actions increased and became highlighted in their narratives. In the first section of this Chapter, Lalithamma who recollected her recovery did not forget to mention her brothers' and friends' support and god's grace but described the turning point in her recovery by saying "*I started helping myself".* Furthermore, her recovery was exemplified by her ability to take care of the others, her children. Similarly, other women also pointed out how they "changed", chose to live, became actors, selves separated from the others *but* in order to become again related to the others, to take care of the others, just like Manika below:

> That is what an Indian woman thinks: if she does not have a good stay in husband's house the next way is only death. Even my intention was the same, when I was in that position but *later I changed: why can't I live. If not for myself I can live for other's sake at least.* At same time in my mother's house they were having a financially very difficult [time]. When I *came [out]* it was helpful for them and helpful for me also.

Their "forced agency" and mobility for stability – facing, dealing and, finally, winning over the difficulties and challenges of the transitory phase – facilitated them to also develop alternative visions of a life without the

husband and to create the alternative transactions instead of the marital transactions.

After the turning point, Hemalatha – as well as other divorced and separated women – started emphasising her own agency (1), her *own* efforts and success as a busy IT-student in order to recover in and move out of transitory phase *by interacting with* other nice, civilised and educated people. As substantial sharing and transactions constitute South Indian kinship as well as the construction of "fluid persons" (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriott 1976), it is essential that a woman is in contact with the right kind of people instead of just *"sitting at home"*. Furthermore, the computer course helped Hemalatha to reach her other goals: to become a professional worker who could not only look after herself *but also* to support, instead of burdening, her widowed mother in poor health and, perhaps, even to meet a new husband-to-be with good qualifications which would increase her potential for further beneficial interaction and sharing. The examples of this chapter generally show that the persons – their lives and consciousnesses – are not wholly determined and locked in by structures, social position and ideology but that there is also room for agents using creative strategies (e.g. Osella & Osella 2000, 11).

Furthermore, Hemalatha – as well as other divorced and separated women – also developed and expressed their visions of the causation (2) although remarkably differently than the informants of Mines, who asserted not only their responsibility for their actions but also for the consequences. Hemalatha also expressed her responsibility for her actions within the marriage and after it – despite the hardship she fulfilled the duty as wife, just like Sita – and about the consequences after the turning point – her own recovery. In contrast, neither Hemalatha nor any other woman considered themselves to be responsible for their marital breakdown even if they had themselves left the marriage (see also Chapter 3). That was the consequence that their husbands should be responsible for. Many women expressed their disappointment, anger or hatred towards their husbands very strongly in words, e.g. calling him names or calling him by his own name, which is considered inauspicious for the husband[122], or by acts, e.g. one woman used to prick her husband's wedding photo with the needle. Furthermore, the women seemed to believe that

[122] A good Hindu wife does not utter the name of her husband, a taboo founded upon the belief that with each such utterance his life is shortened by a day (Sunder Rajan 1993, 83). Generally speaking, a hierarchically lower person should not utter the name of a hierarchically higher person.

"in the end" even their husbands would suffer and thus "*justice*" would prevail. For example, Tarak[123] interpreted the story of Sita and Rama by pointing at Rama's role. She interpreted that *"doubting their wives"* was the gift given to men by Lord Rama. In the end, however, it was Sita who got salvation and went into the earth peacefully after her sufferings, whereas Rama suffered through out his life, till he died. *"He had to live with his guilt. In the same way even today we (women) will go through what ever comes on our way but the men are going to suffer throughout."* Some were fantasizing about their revenge while others believed that the gods would do it on behalf of them or on behalf of "*justice*". One frustrated woman, who had alone sought help for more than one year, was exceptionally determined. She narrated at the end of her long life history, a history filled with misery:

> I want them [her husband and his family] to get punishment for all the mistakes they have made... If I do not get help through this or any other women's organisation I have decided to kill my husband. I will kill all of them and also kill myself. Now my aim is to ruin my husband's family. I want to see them suffering. I am sure that I will succeed.

I suggest that by emphasising the causation and their need for "justice" the women also developed their own idea of *dharma*. As noted by Parish (1994, 93) *dharma* is a mutable, open-textured concept, used flexibly and invoked each time the concept is used (see also Derrett 1978a, xiv-xv). *Dharma* is "what you must do" something like "duty" or "the principle of the right order" (ibid.). As *dharma* has multiple meanings; it is a "space for" moral meaning construction. According to Parish (ibid., 96-97) actors' judgement or intuition about what merits being focused in this way vary in ways related to their life experiences and situations – differently "positioned subjects" construct the meaning of shared cultural symbols and key words in different ways, for example, people of different castes construct the meaning of *dharma* differently (ibid.). Accordingly, the divorced and separated women started to highlight the importance of "justice" and logic of the reciprocity; their husband's "turn" will come; thus justice will be done (cf. Parish 1994, 96) instead of the more common emphasis on the *dharma* of wifely devotion; wives worshipping

[123] H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c.

their husbands as "gods" in the way Hemalatha idolized Sita's worship of Rama (see above).

Moreover, the women developed their idea of *dharma* further by emphasising their responsibility for others; corresponding with a notion of social order (3), the third dimension of responsibility stated by Mines (1994, 18). Accordingly, the more senior (and less subordinate) one is, the more control one has over one's life and the lives of the others; the responsibility the person assumes or seeks to have *for* others (ibid., 182). Through their crises and subsequent recoveries, the divorced and separated women seemed to reach some kind of "seniority" of life experience that also obligated them; it became their new duty or responsibility even if their position was not characterized by the authority that senior women have in their social relations (e.g. Säävälä 2006, 149), at least not automatically. However, their *own* kind of authority in certain social relations started to increase along with their responsibilities, as I will later show (in Chapters 6, 7 and 8). At the end of the transitory phase nearly all of the women stressed how they wanted to help other women – sisters, cousins, neighbours, colleagues, poor women, women in trouble etc. – so that their suffering would not be wasted. Although the women also described their personal growth, even that was directed towards the well-being of other: now they had become strong enough to help others. Moreover, the women's improved social positions as well as their personal expertise; their seniority of life experience, could improve the position of other deprived women through interaction and sharing.

The women's suffering became their advantage and, thus, obtained a noble meaning through others: they could save others from misery. One woman, Veena[124], encapsulated this idea: "*In my case I am a front line soldier. A front line solder has to die. That was the reason for my life".* Thus, the women gave their experience and sufferings for the "use" or "lessons" of others but, on the other hand, they expected to gain sympathy and respect in return. Actually, the ideal of the self-sacrificing woman that is prominent in Sita mythology finds a new form: the women devoted their lives to supporting other women and not their husbands. As sacrifice entails power in Hindu culture, as Nita Kumar (1995), among others, points out, divorced or separated women could increase their power through their sacrifices.

[124] H, 33, u, d, 1c.

Conclusion: Victims and Actors

The divorced and separated women considered that they had waited for a long time before asking for help from the others, however, I would suggest that their threshold of asking help was lower than, for example, it is for the Finnish women to whom "managing on one's own" is a cherished cultural ideal, as presented by Lahti (2001, 159). On the other hand, failing in getting help from others and the feelings of being rejected by others caused enormous disappointments and stress for the relational Indian women who had "learnt interdependence" throughout their lives (see Chapter 2). "Managing on one's own" can be an indicator of failure in a South Indian context. Therefore the divorced and separated women presented themselves both as "victims" and as "actors" in their narratives and also while they were interacting with others during the transitory phase. They were "victims" because of the other people or "actors" on behalf of the other people. As Ewing (ibid., 251-252) shows, people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent and culturally shaped "self-representations" that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly. As persons are often unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies, they may experience a sense of wholeness and continuity despite them (ibid.).

To conclude this chapter I will show how the divorced and separated women manoeuvre the concepts of victim and actor creatively so that both self-representations indicate their relatedness. This supports the idea of 'selves', not as a unified subject or agent but as a shifting combination of roles and statuses in constant reaction to the environment located within a single body, as introduced by Osella & Osella (2000, 10; see also Daniel 1984; Dirks 1992; Moore 1994; Bradley 1996). Moreover, it shows a fluidity embedded in persons' self-representations as well in their self-constructions.

By presenting themselves as "victims", the women emphasized their "innocence" in the marital breakdown and their roles as a "devoted wife" who fulfilled their duty *(dharma*). Moreover, they stressed their relatedness and dependency on their husbands as well as on other people and their despair at being "deserted" and all alone after the marital breakdown. Alternatively, while presenting themselves as "actors", the women sought their "rights" and "justice" and they did not intend to be the wife of an abusive husband anymore. Furthermore, they stressed their own efforts in taking care of themselves and others, if not now then at least in the future. Although these self-representations were like the mirror-

images (duty/right or justice, deserted women/"never again", dependency/independency) the women could alternatively use both of them. The shifting from one self-representation to another took place depending on the woman's state of crisis, for example, they tended to present themselves as victims during the peak of their crisis whereas later, especially after the turning point, the women started to present themselves more and more as "actors". Moreover, these shifts from one self-representation to another took place when the women interacted with different kinds of people in different socially or culturally defined contexts and they wanted to highlight different aspects of their life and of themselves, as Hemalatha's earlier example showed us. Presenting herself as a "victim" and/or an "actor" was one survival strategy. It helped her to re-construct herself through interaction with the other people but it also required some, often subconscious, tactics as both of these self-representations are somehow ambivalent in the Indian context.

Being a "victim" did seem not to be shameful for a relational woman in the sense that she is dependent on others. On the contrary, they were very quick to declare their victimhood. [125] Ideally, interconnection and interdependency should bring harmony and well-being to all. However, marital tragedy is a shame for a woman because it violates dependency, union, unity, wholeness, and, whatever the reasons, the woman is often blamed for this.[126] Thus, by presenting herself as a "victim", an Indian woman wants to stress that *she* followed the prevailing ideals, expectations and practices by fulfilling her duty *(dharma),* i.e. doing *her part* on behalf of the hierarchical whole, in her marriage, in her family, in her community and in the society, despite the heavy hurdles she met. Fur-

[125] In contrast, according to Lahti (2001,10, 87) being a "victim" is particularly shameful and strangely "forbidden" for Finnish women, because it does not fit into the category of strong women, who is economically and emotionally independent and survives in all situations. Moreover, following the postcolonial critics (e.g. Mohanty 1991), I wanted to approach the Indian divorced or separated women not as passive, helpless victims of their traditional sexist cultures and multinational capital but rather as agents taking charge of their lives. Therefore I often felt uneasy when the women openly declared their "victimhood". Some named themselves as "victims of dowry harassment" and others as "deserted women" even if *they* had left their abusive husband.

[126] According to Amato's (1994, 217) study on the impact of divorce on men and women in India and the United States, due to the doctrine of *pativratya* (see Chapter 3) in India people tend to attribute blame for marital breakdown primarily to the wife, regardless of the husband's behaviour. In contrast, in the United States, people are more likely to view marital failure as being the shared responsibility of both spouses. Consequently, Indian women experience more shame, guilt and social rejection than do Indian men, and presumably, American women (ibid.).

thermore, there are mythological models for this kind of time-honoured, self-sacrificing "victimhood", for example, Sita, who I have referred to earlier. The past practice of Sati, in which a widow sacrificed herself on the husband's funeral pyre, is an extreme example of this kind of self-sacrificing victimhood (see e.g. Leslie 1992; Sunder Rajan 1995, 15-63; Narasimhan 1990). One idea embedded in this kind of model of self-sacrificing victimhood is that in the end a woman reaches salvation through it and, thus, her sufferings are glorified. Although most of the women of this study did not accept Sita as someone to emulate (not to mention Sati) they did stress the similarity of their situation or fate to Sitas': they were also suffering through no fault of their own, their husbands had deserted them, they were taking care of the children without the support of the husband. However, presenting herself as a "victim" is also ambivalent for the women because, due to the marital breakdown, they need to move beyond victimhood: the women are sometimes "forced" to change their manners; to become "actors" in order to improve their situation or to stay alive.

Nevertheless, being and presenting herself as an "actor" is also ambivalent for a woman in the Indian context. On one hand, it is positive as it highlights the woman's capability of finding solutions, resisting injustice and moving forward. On the other hand, although Indian mythology as well as history knows "actors", powerful women, those figures are not so prevalent in everyday discourses or maybe they are silenced due to their ambivalence. Usually female power and survival strategies are practiced in more "hidden" manners and in private domains and a women's power should somehow be "encompassed" by masculine power, in order to be benevolent and constructive. Similarly, women's agency often takes more hidden forms.[127] On the contrary, the stereotypical model of "the western" or "westernised" independent career-oriented "actor", who puts her own individualistic benefits before her family, is strongly and negatively presented in India, and this is particularly important for creating middle class identity.[128] As marital breakdown, separation and divorce are generally considered as "western", the label of this kind of stereotyped, imagined, "western-type" of actor is a threat to the Indian woman. Thus,

[127] See Tenhunen's (2003) study of working women's secrets and agency in Calcutta. See also Tenhunen and Fruzzetti (2006, xiii-xiv); Tenhunen (2006); Säävälä (2006, 149) Kumar (1994a; 1994b; 2006); Perez (2006); Tiengtrakul (2006); Vatuk (2006).

[128] I suggest that Indians use a stereotypical model of "a western woman" in order build their own self-representations in opposition to it.

some women continue to represent themselves as "victims" although they already act in a very non-victim-manner in practice. Moreover, it is only after "the turning point" that the women find their victim self-representation problematic because usually others, i.e. family members and workers of the women's organisation, treat a woman as "a victim" and thus reinforce that representation during the transitory phase. Only quite exceptionally, the women are supported in transforming from "a victim" into "an actor", for example, through interaction with the other women with similar experiences. In general, one way for a woman to become an "Indian" actor is to direct her agency towards other, to became "a relational actor" or "relational individual", as I have presented in this chapter. A woman is "actor" through her relationships with other people: she survives and becomes active for the sake of helping other people (sisters, cousins, neighbours, colleagues, poor women, women in trouble) and her own efforts towards a better education or a job are often motivated by the need to serve others.

5. LEGAL BATTLES

The Law as a Resource

It is Saturday, 11:00 at the Family Court of Bangalore, situated in the City Civil Court complex. A court session has just begun and people are rushing to check whether the number of their case is listed on the document hanging on the entrance to the courtroom. Pushpa[129]'s case is listed which means that her case will be handled today in that particular courtroom. Consequently, Pushpa and her brother are having an intensive discussion with Pushpa's lawyer outside the courtroom: they must prepare themselves to testify in the court. Pushpa's lawyer advises them to oppose each allegation made by Pushpa's ex-husband in his statements of objection to Pushpa's petition for the enforcement of a maintenance order. The husband alleges that Pushpa has made a false dowry harassment complaint, created problems for him and that she is about to get married to another man and therefore does not need any maintenance. He accuses Pushpa's brother of the seduction of the ex-husband's sister for a love marriage. After giving instructions, the lawyer rushes into the courtroom because she has several other cases today. Pushpa and her brother wait for their turn while sitting either outside the court room talking to each other or with me, or inside the courtroom listening to the handling of other people's court cases.

The 31-year-old Pushpa's appearance is neat as always when she comes to court. She is wearing a sharply ironed, softly coloured dress, *salwar kameez*, with a long scarf and high-heeled shoes. Instead of the *tali* that married women always wear, she has a thin golden chain around her neck. Her hair is in a ponytail and all her greying hair has been dyed,

[129] H, 30, m, d/j-, 2c.

one by one, with red henna. Her long well-kept nails are polished with the same colour as her lipstick, *"matching colours,"* she cites the advertisement of the products to me. According to Pushpa, over the past five years she has had plenty of time to care for herself, to read women's magazines and to watch satellite TV channels, particularly programmes such as soap operas. Except for the court visits, she spends all her days alone at home. Earlier, before her husband first left her after serious arguments and then *"kidnapped"* their two daughters, she used to be very busy. Assisted with three servants, she cooked three times a day and kept their house neat and tidy. Nowadays she also cooks, eats, cleans and also fasts regularly, but being alone there is "*too much time." "My life is wasted. I come to court or sit alone at home,"* she complains, frustrated.

For the past five years she has also contested her husband's divorce petition in court, submitting her counter petitions for the restitution of conjugal rights, maintenance and custody of the children. She has won the 'restitution of conjugal rights' as well as 'maintenance' cases, the latter also in the high court, but the husband has not complied with the court orders: he has not returned to his matrimonial home nor has he paid the total amount of the maintenance. Consequently, Pushpa has started a new court procedure for the enforcement of the court orders of maintenance. All together her husband should pay her 80 000 rupees, of which he has paid only half. In fact, Pushpa does not want to live with her husband anymore, nor she does want to give him a divorce. *"I want a part of his property, maintenance for my livelihood and my children back to me. If I give him divorce, he will get what he wants and disappear and I won't get anything,"* she rationalizes. Nevertheless, the continuous court visits cause her *"so much tension, tension, tension, so much suffering."* She does not like revealing her family matters in front of everyone in the Family Court. Moreover, she feels the whole matter is so unfair and unjust. *"Why **I** have to be here? I have not done anything wrong but I have to suffer. He left, he deserted me, he took my children, and now he is having fun, enjoying himself with his new [unofficial] wife and has our children with him."* Nowadays Pusha is always broke, she misses her daughters "*too much"* and she suffers from loneliness. *"I have so many problems and one person has created all of them."*

Pushpa plans her weeks and months according to the court visits and meetings with her lawyer. Even while outside the court complex, she is caught up in the court process. Pushpa lives alone in her affinal house

and some of her neighbours are her also ex-affinal relatives. She is very conscious that whoever she meets and whatever she does may be used against her in court. Thus, she does not meet anyone except her brother and a few neighbours and she only stays at home. Her days are long but the nights are even longer as she often can not sleep – she keeps on thinking about the court process or misses her daughters. Sometimes she dreams about a nice job, but as her marriage was arranged, at her ex-husband's request, soon after she finished 10th grade at school, she is not qualified for any profession, and, more importantly, if she takes a job she will lose the maintenance she has fought for. Once her husband tried to throw her out of the house with help of the police but because she had lived and acted so decently the police found no grounds for it. Sometimes Pushpa feels that her house is like a prison, in fact, it even started to look like that after her ex-husband placed steel grills on the windows of the terrace and a big lock on the doors of the second floor of the house so that Pushpa cannot use the upstairs rooms and, in particular, the telephone there.

After hours of waiting, it is finally Pushpa and her brother's turn in court. In turn, they step into the witness box and strongly object to each allegation. The judge repeats the statements and the stenographer records them with an old and loud typewriter. Then Pushpa's lawyer steps up and talks to the judge in a determined manner. As usual, Pushpa's husband is not present. Nevertheless, the courtroom is crowded: a dozen lawyers sitting behind the round table in the middle of the courtroom, women sitting close together behind them on one bench and men on the other, there are no more free places in which to sit. Many people are also standing, waiting and watching the court drama. I stand among them. However, there is so much background noise – doves are cooing and building a nest on the nearest wall, people are whispering, standing up and sitting down, coming and going and the typewriter sounds like machine gun – that I cannot follow the discussion at the front of the courtroom.

Later in the afternoon, when Pushpa and her brother talk with Pushpa's lawyer, I discover that things proceeded according to their wishes. The judge was once again convinced of Pushpa and her brother's innocence, although the brother had in fact had a love marriage with Pushpa's ex-husband's sister. The judge himself suggested that they should now take more severe action against the husband as he has not paid his arrears nor shown up in the court. The lawyer advised Puspha to make an ap-

plication for her husband's arrest and jailing as a last resort. Pushpa says she is afraid of taking such a radical step – what if the husband hurts her later in revenge? In any event, as the offices are about to close it is already too late to take any new action. They decide proceed with the case when they meet again next week in the Family Court.

Later I found out that the court proceedings culminated in the arrest of the husband due to the arrears in alimony. Finally, when the husband could no longer avoid paying the arrears, he announced in court that he would take his wife back instead. Thus, Pushpa's case was finally settled according to Pushpa's own application of 'restitution of conjugal rights'. Paradoxically, Pushpa was shocked by her husband's decision. Over the years and the several court processes, she had already started to adjust to the idea of a final break-up, and she had objected to her husband's divorce petition mainly as a matter of tactics. After her husband's statement of approval, Pushpa could hardly sleep. She kept on thinking whether her husband was seriously coming back or if this was only a new tactic in order to avoid paying maintenance. She wondered, how she could ever adjust herself to live with her violent, hard-drinking and *"womanizing"* husband after all these years. On the other hand, the husband had their daughters whom Pushpa had missed every day of the past five year and who missed her. I did not meet Pushpa anymore, but I heard from her brother, her neighbours and her lawyer that after Pushpa had given strict conditions for her husband's return – no more drinking, beatings, other women – he and their children did move back to live with Pushpa. According to the brother, Pushpa was again very busy and exhausted due to the housework but, on the other hand, very happy to be with her daughters. The neighbours gossiped a lot about whether Pushpa made the right decision – they all knew the bad habits of her husband but, however, also understood Pushpa's feelings as a mother. After a while, Pushpa and her family moved away from the neighbourhood.

The description of Pushpa's life during the court process introduces the themes of this chapter: the women's ability to and motivations for initiating legal action, their agency and search for "justice", the paradoxes, problems and strategies involved in the ritualized court process and its overall meaning for the women, their positions and their "relational" personhood constructed through interaction and sharing. These themes link to broader questions about subjects, power and law. I will go along with the anthropologists interested in the law

who have since the 1960s treated the law as the symbolic representation of the interests of particular groups and as a historical product rather than as a universal category (see Starr and Collier 1989, 3, 24-25). Instead of the idea that law creates order in a society, law is never seen as neutral. Some writing – especially on colonialism and the political sociology of race, class and gender – has emphasized the dark side of the law, considering the legal institutions and processes as tools of domination and disempowerment whereas liberal theory has considered the law as the key, actual or potential, to liberation or empowerment (Comaroff 1994, ix-x). In fact, the law is both. It is "Janus-faced" – it is both a tool of domination and resistance to that domination – and, thus, it also produces paradoxes and contradictions (ibid., ix). This paradox is a critical component of the legal treatment of women: The law subordinates women categorically and yet is an important resource for their empowerment (Lazarus-Black and Hirsch 1994, 17).

Similarly, Smart (1989, 2, 138) argues, that the law is critical in women's lives not only because it exercises a power grounded in 'masculine culture' and disqualifies women's experience/knowledge but also because the law constitutes a kind of institutionalised and formalised site of power struggles – one that can provide resources for women, children and men, albeit in different ways – and thus it remains an important strategic element in political confrontations. The use of the law creates paradoxes, for example, in relation to the position of one particular woman and women in general: the court may empower one woman in her struggle against patriarchal authority, while strengthening the power of law over domestic relations (see e.g., Grossberg 1994). The classic example of this is Shahbano -court case in India, in which one Muslim woman, Shahbano, was successful in being awarded maintenance from her husband under section 125 of the 1973 Code of Criminal Procedure by the Supreme Court of India in April 1985. This then became a fuming religious-political debate and eventually led to the passing of a new Act called the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 1986, preventing other Muslim women

from repeating her success (Pathak & Rajan 1992; Gangoli 2003, 376-385).[130]

Overall, discussions in legal-anthropological literature about the issues of power and resistance have viewed law as a resource that persons and groups use in order to negotiate the conditions of their lives, to achieve their personal goals, and to resists the hegemonic definitions of selfhood (Lazarus-Black and Hirsch 1994 eds.). Contrary to assumptions that women pursue resistance out of public view, primarily in "domestic spheres"[131], studies of women's use of courts suggests that women *also* turn to the state to contest gender hierarchy and they use legal institutions demanding their rights, privileges, protections associated with their legal status or calling on the courts to enforce a "justice" (Lazarus-Black and Hirsch 1994, 12; Collier 1973; Fineman and Thomadsen 1991; Hirsch 1994, 218, 223-224; Merry 1990; Starr 1989; Lazarus-Black 1991; In India Moore 1994; 1998; Vatuk 2001). A good example of this is Moore's (1994; 1998) ethnographic study of a Muslim woman's decades-long contradictory dispute against her husband in the pluralistic legal system in rural Rajastan, in India. Although she did not achieved the result she wanted – maintenance from her husband – but was instead obliged to return to live with and follow her husband's orders, she disobeyed village law and got away with it, she made her voice heard and sought alliances with her male relatives, and she had a plan for future lawsuits (Moore 1994, 110; Moore 1998, 154-156).

Although these discussions support my argument I nevertheless prefer the concept of agency instead of the notion of resistance because it is "more adept at capturing the fluidity of transformative acts" as noted by Fruzzetti and Tenhunen (2006, x). Moreover, like them (ibid.), I also consider the notion of agency more compatible with the understanding that there is no clear border between culture as the weapon of domination and as the weapon of the weak, instead, the concept of dominance

[130] Under the provisions of this act, divorced Muslim women fall outside the scope of section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedures and the divorced woman's husband is obliged to return the *mehr* (dower, or marriage settlement) and pay her maintenance no longer than during the period of *iddat* (the period of three months following the divorce) (Pathak & Rajan 1992, 259). However, despite its constraints, The Act has also been positively interpreted to protect the economic right of divorced Muslim women, as shown by Agnes (2001) nearly twenty years later.

[131] In India, see e.g. Säävälä (2001, 119-123); Srinivas (1999, 141); Tiengtrakul (2006); Kumar (2006); also how the borders of "homes" and "domesticity" are transformed see Tenhunen (2006) and Fruzzetti 2006).

and subordination emerge from symbolic cosmologies, the superordinate and subordinate drawing from each other's identities, as shown by pioneering studies on the cultural construction of politics (Dumont 1980; Geerzt 1980; Kapferer 1988; Östör 1984) and by recent ethnographic studies on culture, power and agency in India (Fruzzetti and Tenhunen 2006 (eds.)).

Consequently, I find it fruitful to view the law as a resource[132] that divorced and separated women use – or do not use – because it reveals both the creativity and vulnerability of their agency. Moreover, it exposes the law's potency as well as its weakness as a tool while women are negotiating their positions and living conditions after marital breakdown. In the following sections, I will look at the law as a resource of the divorced and separated women from the three interlinked angles. First, I will explore how the law as a resource is not equal for everyone (1).[133] Second, I will look at the law as divorced and separated women's resource for the seeking of "justice" (2), and third, I will look at the law as their resource in developing new self-representations and re-constructing their personhood while they carry on the critical transformation caused by the marital breakdown (3). I will also explore the different meanings that women give to legal procedures and to their results within and after the transitory phase, and whether a legally obtained divorce is a necessity in cutting off the marital bond and in becoming a "divorcee". I will look at whether the ritualized processing of problems in the court change supported the women's critical transformation into the position of "divorced woman" that would change the foundation of their lives. Again, I will pay attention to the flows of money – in the forms of alimony, maintenance, dowry – and how they manifest the bonds of people. Through these questions I hope to illuminate broader theoretical questions dealing with the potency of the law and of the women's agency and personhood in South India.

I will start by looking at the women's ability and motivation to approach the court and turn to legal processes after the marital breakdown.

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[132] My idea of looking at law as a resource is inspired by Sylvia Vatuk's study on the impact of Muslim Personal Law on women in India (Vatuk 2006; see also Vatuk 2001; 2003; 2005).

[133] See e.g. Starr and Collier (1989, 6-9), for how legal systems encode asymmetrical power relationships.

Who Goes to Court and Why?

The Law as an Unequal Resource

The disputes relating to marriage and family affairs are dealt with within special courts in the larger cities set up by The Family Courts Act 1984.[134] The Act was passed, along with other legal reforms concerning women,[135] as a response to the women's movement's demand to pass laws and procedures which would ensure women's economic rights within marriage and make divorce proceeding speedier and less expensive, less traumatic and more just for women. Although the Act is considered a positive step, it has not been able to fulfil the expectations mentioned above (Agnes 1996; see also Bakshi 1993, Desai & Krisnhnaraj 1990, 291; Gandhi & Shah 1993). A Family Court was set up in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, in 1986. There were three Family Courts functioning in the City Civil Court Complex in Bangalore in the year 2000. Approximately half the divorced and separated women were involved – or had been involved – in the court processes dealing with each of their matrimonial cases (28 out of 52) after their marital breakdown in the year 2000 – either due to their own (or joint) initiative (17+2) or due to the husband's initiative (7) for divorce or separation or due to their maintenance petition (2) (see table 5.1). Yet, the other half of the divorced and separated women (24) were not and had not been involved in court proceedings (see table 5.2).

[134] Elsewhere matrimonial cases are dealt with in the regular civil courts.

[135] The rape law was amended in 1983; The Dowry Prohibition Act was amended in 1984 and again in 1986; cruelty and harassment to wives was made a cognisable offence under S. 498(A) in the IPC in 1983 and a special section to deal with dowry deaths was included in the IPC (S.304B) in 1986 (Agnes 1996, 285).

Table 5.1: The number of women who had been involved in court proceedings

Women who had sought judicial divorce either of their own initiative or together with their husbands	17
Women who had sought a judicial separation	2
Women who were involved in a maintenance case in court but without seeking a divorce or separation petition	2
Women who were opposing the husband's divorce petition and who had filed their counter petitions (e.g. restitution of conjugal rights, maintenance or alimony) in court	7
The total number of the women involved in court proceedings	**28 (N=52)**

Table 5.2: The number of women who had not been involved with court proceedings

Women who had obtained an out-of-court divorce (4 Muslim, 1 Hindu)	5
Women who intended to start a legal divorce process later	2
Women who were still in a state of crisis and uncertain about the future	8
Women who had decided not to initiate the court process and their reasons: The husband is dead Religion (2 Christians, 1 Hindu) Poverty Knowledge of legal processes	 1 3 4 1
The total number of women not involved with court proceedings	**24 (N=52)**

Note for table 5.1 and 5.2, one woman had obtained a judicial separation but she was opposing a divorce initiated by her husband, two women are counted twice as they had divorced/separated twice, therefore the total number (N) is 52 instead of 50.

The law is a vital part of the ongoing power struggle in society, thus, both the essence of the law and the position from which one enters the legal process influences the success or failure of the struggle (Lazarus-Black and Hirsch 1994, 12) as well as the possibility of entering the legal process. Accordingly the law entails paradoxes as well as creates them. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that, as the illustration of Pushpa's life also showed, the law is not only a resource but also a restriction for women – it may restrain their lives, their movements and discussions both inside and outside the court. Thus, I will look at what kind of paradoxes the women faced while using or trying to use the law as their resource. I will also seek to answer the question: which of the divorced and separated women could use the law as their resource?

Firstly, the women who were the initiators for the divorce or the other applications had usually overcome their most acute crises caused by the marital breakdown, faced their "turning point" and given up hope of a reunion. In contrast, the women who were still in the middle of an acute crisis (8, see table 5.2) were often too depressed and confused and had more important things to be concerned about regarding daily living and surviving, such as money for livelihood and a place to live. Moreover, some (2, see table 5.2) had plans to start the legal process but they kept postponing their plans because they needed more time, money, a good lawyer or emotional or practical support.

Secondly, the women in the court processes had gained, through their family, friends, women's organisation or by their own activity, the resources necessary for the court process: money, knowledge and contact with an advocate. Continual court visits also required a lot of time. In fact due to the required resources some women considered their situation as paradoxical. For example, Sumitra[136] wanted a well-paid regular job in order to support herself and to start the court process. Once she got it, she realised that it was impossible to start a demanding court process as she could not be absent from her job. Her only choice was to suggest to her husband that he agree to a divorce by 'mutual consent'. Consequently, she had to give up all her other demands. On the other hand, Kamala[137] who did not have enough money for her and her children's livelihood went to court *"only for the sake of money*" – she wanted maintenance from her husband. However, even at the beginning of the process

[136] H, 39, u, d/j, 0c.
[137] C, 39, m, s/u, 3c.

Kamala realised that she could not even afford her "free" lawyer.[138] The lawyer expected her to give him some *"coffee-money"* not to mention the wide range of forms or stamps she was supposed to pay for. Similarly, the poorer women (4, see table 5.2) considered divorce by court to be either useless or beyond their capabilities. Kusum[139] explained to me: *"Divorce and such things are for rich people, not for the people like us. If we need to divorce, we need to spend a lot of money on the advocate and we have to be in court whenever they give new dates. So it is all a waste of time and money."* Paradoxically, in-depth knowledge about the inequality embedded in the law could also prevent one from starting a legal process (1, see table 5.2). Satyanarain[140], worked for a women's organisation that promotes women's legal rights. Thus, she knew *"too much about the unjust and humiliating practices of legal procedures"* and considered her own position to be too vulnerable.

Thirdly, the religious background of the women influenced whether they initiated legal procedures in the court or not. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 1), family relations are governed by religious 'personal laws' in India. The four major religious communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi) each have their own religious laws concerning marriage, divorce, succession, adoption, guardianship and maintenance and the couples having a civil marriage have their own marriage law.[141] Christian women (see table 5.2) particularly, considered their chances of getting a divorce as too low in comparison to the required effort. Moreover, they also felt that getting a divorce was against their beliefs. According to the Indian Divorce Act 1869, which was still in force during my fieldwork,

[138] If a person cannot afford a lawyer she/he may apply under Order 33, Rule 9A of the CPC (Code of Civil Procedure, 1908) to be declared "an indigent person" and for the Court to assign her/him a lawyer (Jaising (ed.) 2001, 95).

[139] H, 38, p, s/u, 3c.

[140] H, 47, u, s/u, 2c.

[141] Hindus, Buddhist, Jains and Sikhs follow The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 and The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 (Diwan 1998, 2-9; Jaising (ed.) 2001, xxxix, xl). Parsis follow the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936. At the time of my field work, Christians followed The Indian Divorce Act, 1869 but the law has changed since the Indian Divorce (Amendment) Bill 2001 (Deshpande 2001). Couples, who have a civil marriage or who have registered their religious marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 follow that law (Jaising 2001). In addition, customary laws of different communities still play an important role regulating marriages (Jaising 2001). Most of Muslim Personal Law is uncodified, thus, there are no comprehensive marriage and divorce Act for Muslims (e.g. Parashar 1992, 160; Ahmad 2003). However, Muslim women can seek a divorce in court based on The Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939 (ibid.).

Christian women did not have the option of divorce by 'mutual consent'. To be eligible for divorce they had to prove not only their husbands' adultery but also other serious offences like bigamy, incest, cruelty, desertion etc. (Parashar 1992, 287, see Chapter 5).[142] Muslim women, on the other hand, were usually divorced via an out-of-court divorce (4 out of 7 Muslim women, see table 5.2).[143] In India, the contract of marriage in Islam may be dissolved by the husband, whenever he desires and without assigning any cause, by *talaq*-divorce.[144] Moreover, the Muslim women's chances of getting maintenance were much lower than those women of the other religions because of the controversial Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 1986, (Pathak & Rajan 1992; Gangoli 2003, 376-38) discussed earlier.[145] In fact, with two (Christian women) exceptions, the women who were engaged or who had been engaged in matrimonial cases (such as divorce, maintenance or restitution of conjugal rights) in the court were Hindus. Nevertheless, although the Hindu's legislation allows divorce, the woman's own faith could prevent her from seeking it. Nandita[146], a Hindu-Brahmin, whose marriage had broken down more than ten years ago, wanted a divorce to be granted by the

[142] The situation improved after the Indian Divorce (Amendment) Bill 2001 (Despande 2001).

[143] In addition, one Hindu woman had had an out-of-court divorce decided by a *panchaya*-meeting on her own initiative.

[144] A *talaq* may be effected orally or by a written document called a *talaqnama.* There are different forms – more or less approved – of *talaq*-divorce in use. The most reprehensible form of divorce and, by far, the most common (*talaq-ul-bidaat* or *talaq-i-badai*) is when the husband simply makes three pronouncements immediately during a single *tuhr* (period between menstruation) either in on sentence, e.g., "I divorce thee thrice" or in separate sentences, e.g., "I divorce thee, I divorce thee, I divorce thee". (Moinuddin 2000, 92-96.) Hanafi law recognises a *talaq*-divorce even if pronounced in the absence of witnesses or while intoxicated, in anger or jest whereas Shia law requires the divorce to be an oral pronouncement in front to two witnesses (Parashar 1992, 287). Marriage may also be dissolved by the mutual consent of the husband and wife without court intervention by *khula (or khul)* or *mubara* divorce or by a judicial decree at the suit of the wife based on the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939 (Vatuk (2008); Moinuddin 2000, 92-93). Moreover, according to Vatuk (ibid.) a woman-initiated extra-judicial divorce *(Khul')* is a real option for Muslim women and frequently availed of, although women initiated divorce is rarely even mentioned in other kinds of scholarly and popular literature on Muslim divorce in India. However, none of 8 Muslim women of this study had used this option.

[145] Under the provisions of this act, divorced Muslim women fall outside the purview of section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedures and the divorced woman's husband is obliged to return the *mehr* (dower, or marriage settlement) and pay her maintenance no longer during the period of *iddat* (the period of three months following the divorce) (Pathak & Rajan 1992, 259).

[146] H, 50, u, s/u, 3c.

court but was "*too afraid*" of it. She believed that breaking the sacrament would be a threat to her children's lives. Twice she had seriously considered initiating legal divorce proceedings and both times her children met grave danger, a car accident and gas damage, and were narrowly saved. She took this as a warning: her marriage is a sacrament that she should not break. Next I will look at how the divorced and separated women used the law as a resource for seeking justice.

The Law as a Resource for Seeking Justice

The ideal of the law gives the promise of "justice" based on the "truth" that an innocent person can seek in order to solve her/his problems if they are identified and addressed by the statutes of law. Although the law's 'claim to truth' – which Smart (1989, 9-11) compares to the discourse about science – is not manifested so much in its practice but rather in the ideal of the law, the law has its own methods, its own testing group, its own specialized language and system of results. It claims to have a method of establishing the truth of events, and judge is held to be a man of wisdom, a man of knowledge, not a mere technician who can ply his trade (ibid, 10). Thus, the decision to seek justice in court cannot be reduced to a simplistic calculation of whether or not one might "win" (Lazarus-Black and Hirsch 1994, 16). Instead, the seeking of justice may be an important action as such or it may be motivated by other means. Thus, I will look at how the divorced and separated women developed, manifested and acted out their notions of justice and *dharma* through the court processes.

Some women wanted to get maintenance or alimony with a divorce decree but not "only" for the sake of money. Rathamma[147], who was now actively involved with a woman's organisation, explained her motivation as follows, *"I want to teach him [the husband] a lesson, to punish him, as revenge. I do not want money but I want my rights. My husband asked me what rights do I have. I want to show him my rights."* Similarly some other women contested their husband's divorce petition as a tactic or for revenge.[148]

[147] H, 45, m, d/j-, 3c/1996 + H, 49, m, d, 3c/2000.

[148] According Mehrotra's (2003, 206) study of single mothers in India, refusing to divorce is sometimes meted out to the "errant" partner.

On the other hand, many of the women who wanted to maintain or re-establish their marital bond also sought maintenance or alimony from their husbands. Some were, of course, in practical need of it while others wanted maintenance – again – as a form of compensation. For example, after years of contesting her husband's divorce petition, Veena[149] finally gave "*her price*", her conditions for the divorce: 300,000 rupees for maintenance in one lump sum. She felt that such an award gave her at least "*some justice*". She justified her solution in the following terms: by getting married to her, her husband had committed to take care of her for the rest of his life. If *he* then "*deserts"* her without her fault, why should *she* give up her right to be supported, thus, the least he should do is carry on his financial support. Thus, maintenance was considered not only as a tool of revenge but also as a link or "*right*" that every ex-wife should have. It was "*justice*" to get maintenance from a husband: it was worth fighting for. Furthermore, through regular maintenance the women would maintain at least something of their marital bond, i.e., their husbands' financial support, an important string of the bond. On the other hand, some women who were determined to get their divorce did not want to maintain any contact, not even in the form of maintenance, with their husbands. They considered it *"too painful and too regular a reminder of the disappointment and the humiliation of the marital failure"* as Rossy[150] put it. They wanted to put an end to the marital duties of both husband and wife and to have a quick divorce by 'mutual consent' which requires only a couple of court visits followed by a half-year waiting period, i.e. the easiest way to obtain a divorce decree.[151]

The divorced and separated women also searched for *"justice"* through the court process in order to correct a false picture given of them and to get emotional relief and a moral victory over their husbands. By it, they wanted to engage social support for themselves which is essential in order

[149] H, 33, u, d, 1c.

[150] C, 63, u, d/j + s/u, 2c.

[151] Divorce by mutual consent is recognised under the Hindu Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act, Parsi Marriage and Divorce Acts, 1936-88, and Muslim law (Diwan 1998, 175). For example, in Hindu law the requirements for the presentation of the petition by mutual consent are (1) that the spouses have been living separately for a period of one year (2) that they have not been able to live together and (3) that have mutually agreed that their marriage should be dissolved (ibid.). After the presentation of the petition the parties are required to wait for a period of six months but not for eighteen months or more (ibid.). At the time of my fieldwork, divorce by mutual consent was not allowed for Christians under the Indian Divorce Act, 1869. The Indian Divorce (Amendment) Bill 2001 later changed this (Despande 2001).

to develop new self-representations and to re-construct relational personhood through interaction and sharing, a subject I will next look into.

The Law as a Resource to Regulate Social Relatedness

South Indian personhood is characterised by fluidity and "relationality", as presented throughout this study, thus, I will look at how the divorced and separated women used the law as a resource in order to cut and create bonds and connections through legal means, and, hence, to regulate or to manifest their social relatedness and to construct their relational personhood. Legal processes do not merely reflect and reproduce dominant cultural concepts of self, personhood and identity but they are, as Coombe (1991, 5) put it, constitutive of subjectivities. Moreover, I explore how those subjectivities – or persons with a range of self-representations – may sometimes challenge the dominant concepts and create alternatives to them.

Altogether, 38 of the 52 divorced or separated women did not want to continue their marriages, 5 of them with some reservation (see Chapter 4, table 4.1). Half of them (17+2, see table 5.1) sought a judicial divorce or separation. They considered that a judicial divorce decree would confirm their marital breakdown and make them free from their husbands. That need was particularly central if the woman wanted to remarry or if the woman's husband wanted to continue the marriage or if he had harassed the woman after the marital breakdown. The women wanted to show their husbands how determined they were over the final break up and the absolute cutting of their connection. Some women wanted to certify economic freedom from their extravagant husbands through a divorce decree.

Four women started the court process in order to re-establish contact with their children and one planned to do so. They applied for custody of or visiting rights to their children in addition to the divorce or separation petition. Even those women who had already adjusted to the situation that their child/children were living with their father and accepted it *"thinking about what is best for the children"*, started the court process by applying for custodial rights. By doing so, they wanted to demonstrate to their children – as well as to other people – that they loved their children and that they had not rejected them – no matter what the husband would claim. Moreover, the court process provided concrete evidence of it – via the actual court documents – to show their children, if not now,

then maybe later. Debi[152], for example, eventually showed all the court documents to her then mature children to assure them of her love for them – all these years she had struggled in the court for their custody and visiting rights – and in order to correct the picture that the ex-husband had given to them about her departure – she did not leave them because she wanted to move to the USA but because her husband had had an affair. Thanks to the court process, she had everything in black and white. The fact that some of the statements, for example, about her husband's affair, were only in her applications and not in the order, did not seem to lessen their value as proof. Furthermore, through the court process, a woman isolated from her children can bind herself, at least somehow, to her children and their lives and to feel that they are still connected.

The child or the children were also a reason for some women to contest their husband's divorce application. *"They have only one father and one mother",* was their explanation. After the divorce the ex-husband could easily remarry and complicate the situation *"too much".* A few women whose children were living with the father especially contested the husband's divorce applications because they wanted to save their children from the inevitable problems caused by their father's new marriage. Debi visualized how her children would be forced to compete for their father's time and interest, not to mention the financial resources, with their potential step-mother. Thus, she was proud of the *"indirect"* influence and protection that she could cast over her children's lives by contesting her husband's divorce petition in court. Moreover, these women objected to the husband's divorce plans as a matter of tactics – they wanted to preserve some "bargaining" power, particularly, in relation to their children.

The women who wanted to maintain or re-establish their marital bond did not want a divorce process in court. However, they often had no alternative after receiving the husband's divorce petition because they wanted to contest it (7, see table 5.1). Moreover, many of these women initiated their counter attack by applying for restitution of conjugal rights. The purpose of this legal remedy is to compel a spouse who has left the marital home to return.[153] From the women's perspective, the

[152] C, 46, u, s/j, 2c.

[153] See details of this act in Diwan (1998, 113-119) and the historical perspective in Chandra (1998).

problem with this is that there is no mechanism to enforce restitution in practice.

On the other hand, there were also women who did not want to have any relationship or contact with their husbands anymore or who had already given up hope of a reunion, but who did not seek a divorce through the court process (9, see table 5.2). They said that they managed well enough in their position as separated but not legitimately divorced women and they did not want to have any more humiliation, which they believed to be inevitable if they initiated court proceedings. Kamala[154] emphasised that a legal divorce is *"only for the sake of society."* She did not need it as "*in her heart"* she knew that she was already *"divorced".* She even mentioned the precise moment, date and time that ended her marriage and responsibilities as wife. That day her husband had unofficially married another woman and tried to bring her to their home (see Chapter 4). Consequently, she "*removed"* her husband from her *"mind"* and marked her *"divorce"* by removing her toe rings and *kumkum* (a sacred red mark on the forehead) – the signs of a married woman – and never wearing them again. The women's opinions about legal divorce would often change over the years, along with their life situations or attitudes (see later).

To sum up, the divorced and separated women initiated court petitions or replied to them in order to achieve something they needed – freedom from a husband, a reunion, status, money, justice or even revenge or compensation – through decrees relating to divorce, maintenance, custody, visiting rights and the restitution of conjugal rights. Thus, the women used law as resource in order to regulate their social relatedness – to cut and to create bonds and connections through legal means –and, therefore, to construct their "relational" personhood and simultaneously to seek "justice". The legislation and the accessibility of a divorce decree or other decrees also influenced whether the women initiated the legal process. They carefully weighed the material and immaterial benefits and the cost of the process before finally deciding to start or leave it. However, the women also made the wrong calculations because they did not have enough or the proper information about the court process. The situation kept on changing and it was often impossible to predict the husband's moves. Next I will move from the women's expectations or fears to their experiences of the legal process: what kinds

[154] C, 39, m, s/u, 3c.

of difficulties they faced and what kinds of strategies they used to overcome them.

I will begin with describing how one woman, Sheela[155], used legal actions as her resource in order to cut her marital bond and to maintain and strengthen the bond between her and her daughter and what kind of paradoxes she faced during the process. This prolonged, extraordinary court case which, in fact, all the women's cases were, and Sheela's commentary of it, illuminate the problems of one particular woman but also the aspects mentioned above that characterise the law as resource: the inequality of law and the women's search for justice and multiple motives of the court process in order to regulate their social relations and social relatedness. Moreover, as a part of a power struggle the law both entails and creates paradoxes and restrictions.

The Contested Case of Sheela

In Sheela's Protestant-Christian, Bombay based family, a love marriage was not as such an issue. In fact, Sheela's father had not arranged the marriages of Sheela's two elder sisters and two elder brothers. Instead, being himself a *"self made man"* – who migrated from a Keralian village first to the Gulf to collect property and then to Bombay for a good job as a representative of the Deccan Herald group of newspapers – he preferred providing his children with a good education than arranging their marriages. Sheela had also completed her B.A. degree in philosophy when she joined a diploma course in journalism as well as a college of law and moved to Bangalore. There she met Felix, her husband. He knew Sheela and her family in Bombay. He visited Sheela, they became friends and started to meet regularly, first in Bangalore and later in Bombay where Sheela returned with Felix. Felix became a regular visitor of Sheela's house but he did not introduce Sheela to his family nor marry her for more than two years, despite Sheela and her father's growing and, in many ways, expressed anxiety. According to Sheela, money was their major problem. Right from the beginning Felix was more attached to her money and her father's assumed property than her. However, Sheela realised this all too late – they had already been friends for such a long time and Sheela and her family had heard dozens of Felix's excuses for

[155] C, 54, m, d/j, 1c.

postponing the marriage. Thus, they were more worried about whether Felix was going to marry or leave her than about his motivations. According to Sheela, the marriage finally took place because Felix desperately wanted money for his plan to emigrate to the Gulf to earn well. After the wedding he started an endless request for money which he reinforced with beatings and loud rows, despite Sheela's early pregnancy. One month later Sheela's father died of a heart attack. Sheela's brother came from United States to settle everything and decided to give up the rented flat where Sheela and Felix had also lived together with Sheela's parents. Sheela's mother left with the brother to United States where Sheela's other brother and sister had also settled down. The father had no savings nor property to be left to Sheela and so she had only Felix to lean on. However, Felix fought with Sheela's brother and Sheela, and then he left for the Gulf without her. Sheela lived at first with her friend and then moved to her father's younger brother's house in Kerala for the delivery of the child. She recalled:

> My daddy had died. I had no house. I did not know where I was going to live. I came from different kind of background, now I was going to live in Kerala. I had never even stayed there before. People are conservative and orthodox. I could not go out anywhere. I was just in the house.

Later Felix returned to Bombay, and Sheela and her daughter lived with him in a small flat for a year and a half. All the time they fought over money. Felix wanted money from Sheela's relatives and Sheela was upset about their living conditions – no air conditioning, no car nor many other things she had got used to at her parents' house. Felix tried different jobs and businesses but nothing worked out successfully. Thus, Sheela sold her jewellery, one by one, to provide for her and her daughter's livelihood.

Meanwhile Sheela got a telegram from her eldest brother in United States: he would take Sheela and her daughter there as immigrants, but only if Sheela divorced Felix. At that point of time, Sheela was not *"mentally prepared"* for divorce because of *"the stigma attached to divorce,"* but as the situation did not improve and the husband continued to ignore both Sheela and her daughter, she began the divorce process a few years later. *"In my case there was no love or affection. There was no binding. He was doing nothing for my daughter,"* Sheela explained. Sheela moved to

Bangalore to live with her mother, who had since returned from United States. Through lawyers Sheela found out that if she wanted to file her divorce case in Bangalore, she had to have lived there with her husband at least for one month. Sheela thus, invited Felix to Bangalore and they lived there together whilst again constantly fighting for one month, which gave *"the jurisdiction to file the case in Bangalore"* as Sheela explained. When Sheela filed her first petition for judicial separation in 1982, Felix went crazy. *"He started telling me that he would murder me even if it means that he would go to jail, because he did not want a divorce"*, Sheela said. As Felix threatened to capture their then six-year old daughter, Sheela put her into a boarding school far from Bangalore *"until the case was over and we would move to United States"* and visited her once a month. According to Sheela, her daughter was *"not happy there because she was very small and very attached to me… She was angry at him (ex-husband) and angry at me because she had to go to boarding school but she could not express the anger towards me because she was very dependent on me."* For the daughter's longer holidays in Bangalore, Sheela provided police protection against the husband who "*used to come and trouble us."*

For more than a year, Sheela did not come to court in person as she followed her lawyer's advice and let him take care of the whole process. However, the case hardly proceeded. Later Sheela found out that her own lawyer had kept asking for "more time" without Sheela's knowledge and permission. Her lawyer was Felix's lawyer's friend who had followed the friend's wishes. Since then, whenever the case came up, Sheela was also in court in person. She described the process as follows,

> First of all, you are already living through a trauma. … At that time there were no Family Courts. My case used to come once in a week in Mayo Hall and we used to sit with criminals in court... They [the personnel of the court] were not dealing with the case as they really ought to have. They showed no real interest. Their [those who are divorcing] emotions and feelings; that aspect was totally ignored. It is. You are there, and you are looked down upon. .... Some of the proceedings are in open court. There will be some other lawyers. There everybody stares at you and glares at you. Even the peon [a messenger/attendant in court] starts nicknaming you. It is not done in a correct manner. Judges don't have any sympathy. They look down upon people who are going through a divorce and they always

> blame the women. They think it is because she is not adjusting that this is happening, they don't think about what the man is doing.

Later, with a new lawyer Sheela changed her petition from the judicial separation to divorce. Being Christians, Sheela's and Felix's case was to be handled under the Indian Divorce Act 1869. This meant that in order to get a divorce, Sheela was supposed to prove her husband's adultery and an additional ground for divorce. Proving the additional ground, which was cruelty – *"both physical, mental and every sort of cruelty"* – was not a problem: Sheela convinced the judge with statements and oral evidence, a police complaint and the letters written by Sheela to her family members describing her misery. Felix had filed his 'objections' to Sheela's first petition for judicial separation two years earlier but this time he had not longer filed any objection nor did he show up in court to give evidence or send his lawyer to cross-examine Sheela. However, proving adultery turned out to be a difficult task. *"Actually every judge who I knew or met said that I could never get a divorce,"* Sheela said. In her petition Sheela alleged that her husband *"used to misbehave in the presence of the female servants by sometimes stripping himself naked"* and the result was that she could not get any servant on account of the immoral behaviour of the husband. Later Sheela understood that this kind of statement was not enough to prove adultery. "*The judge required proof to the extent that there should be penetration. So how I could prove that? They said misbehaviour is not enough,*" Sheela recalled. While giving oral evidence and being cross-examined in court, Sheela recalled one incident when she had returned to their home in Bombay to find out that their maidservant had left while she was away. When questioning the servant, the servant had said *"Tera maradmera izzat nikal raha hai / Your husband had stripped off my self-respect"* (translation in the court documents). According to Sheela and her lawyer – and the huge English dictionary the lawyer brought to the court – that statement indicated the husband's adultery. When the judge demanded for the further clarification, Sheela stated that her husband had intercourse with the servant against her will. Furthermore, according to Sheela, although she had talked about 'maidservant' in her oral statement of evidence, the typist of the court had typed down '<u>male</u>servant'. Consequently, when the judge prepared his decision, he made it as if Sheela had accused her husband of raping a female servant and of also being a homosexual and that she had *"miserably failed to establish"* her accusations, which ones she had not even mentioned in her original petition,

as the judge pointed out. She discovered this only after reading the given judgement. After a four-year court battle Sheela's divorce petition was dismissed for the lack of evidence, but Sheela was granted a judicial separation on the grounds of cruelty. Sheela felt that the dismissal of her petition was at least partly the fault of her second lawyer. According to Sheela, she was a criminal lawyer and therefore she made too many technical mistakes and did not even know how to file a petition in the proper way, which Sheela realised too late. The lawyer, for example, only replaced the sentence about 'judicial separation' with 'divorce' in Sheela's petition when she changed the request from 'judicial separation' to 'divorce'. The original petition was prepared to demonstrate all kinds of inconvenience that Sheela experienced within her marriage as a result of her husband's 'mental and physical cruelty'. 'Cruelty' was a sufficient ground for a judicial separation decree, but for a divorce, 'adultery' should be mentioned as the main ground. Consequently, there were no sufficient grounds for divorce even mentioned in the petition itself. Later Sheela's lawyer had filed an appeal wit an affidavit stating the fact that the respondent committed adultery with the maid servant was not mentioned in the original petition "*due to an oversight*" but it was disclosed during the evidence. Nevertheless, the judge found it impossible to believe that *"such a serious allegations could be forgotten to be alleged specifically in the petition if they were true,"* as the judge had stated in the order.

Thus, when Sheela took her case to The High Court of Bangalore, she chose a third lawyer. According to Sheela, the third one did her work well but was too *"greedy for money"*. At every stage Sheela was supposed to pay her something: for each petition, for typing fees, for transport fees of motor rickshaw from her home to the court and back, for lunches during the court sessions and for one heavy meal for the lawyer's whole family. Furthermore, the lawyer made it clear: besides the fees, Sheela would have to pay her ten percent of whatever she was to receive if she filed a case for maintenance and got one. But Sheela did not file any maintenance case as she was going to United States. *"The lawyers also take advantage of you in every stage. They do not really help you out,"* she complained. In The High Court, Sheela's 'false allegations' about her husband's homosexuality became an issue but Sheela's lawyer was successful in convincing the judge of Sheela's innocence in this matter.

While Sheela's case was in the High Court, the affairs took a new turn outside the courtroom. Sheela's husband sent *"a formal good-bye"*

letter to Sheela through their daughter by saying that the letter would help Sheela get a divorce. In the letter, Felix wrote that he had found "*a friend"* with whom he is living and would be having a child soon, and that he had changed his religion since *"he had no more faith in Christianity"* and "*he felt more free and happy without Christian dogma and principles".* In the letter, Felix gave two potential grounds for a divorce decree under the Indian Divorce Act, 1869: adultery and conversion to another religion together with a marriage to another women. Although he did not mention that they were married, living together usually meant that in India. Sheela's lawyer brought this new evidence to the High Court. The judge noted the potential value of the new evidence but refused to change the order of the lower court on the basis of this new evidence which had not been presented earlier. He recommended that Sheela file a completely new petition for divorce based on this new evidence and the earlier decree for judicial separation, in which cruelty was already proved as a ground. Although Sheela's High Court petition was dismissed for very similar reasons than her previous petition, Sheela was confident that her forthcoming petition, with the new evidence, would finally result in divorce decree.

Sheela analyses the grounds and reasons for her divorce as follows:

> My fight was that he was not supporting me. That is why I went and lived on my own. But the law makes it necessary to prove adultery. Whether there is adultery or not. You have to prove it. So you do everything possible to prove it. Some people create stories to prove it. It is very difficult. If two people don't want to live together and they want part amicably, you are not allowed to part amicably. So, you have to come to court, make allegations against other party. You cannot amicably settle the matter. So the divorce becomes the dirtiest thing. You come and wash your dirty linen in public. You have to create the stories that never existed. Even if it is not there, you have to make it up, just to get the ground of adultery in order to get a divorce. In my case, of course he had [other women]. But I was not chasing after him to find out whether he was committing adultery or not. I was not prepared to live with him. So, when I was not going to live with him, it is natural that he will have somebody else... So definitely, he would want to go and see other women but that was not why I really divorced. I divorced him basically because

> he was not providing for us and was not taking care of us... and because he kept on claiming money from us.

According to Sheela, her case would have been settled sooner if Sheela's employer, the women organisation, had not got interested in her case. The person in charge wanted Sheela to lose first her case in the High Court and then to take it to the Supreme Court as 'a public interest litigation case' in which a person, i.e. Sheela, stated that the legislation is discriminatory and violates the constitution. According to Sheela, the person in charge wanted to change the outdated Christian legislation, *"to show how women are suffering*" and to get *"publicity"* as a person and as an organisation that *"strikes down the discrimination against Christian women."* Sheela opposed the idea. First of all, she knew that if her case went to the Supreme Court, it would take years to settle it. "*Nobody who is going through a divorce wants her case to go on for years. You want to end with the trauma once for all."* Secondly, Sheela knew that although she had lost her case in the High Court, she would now easily get a divorce decree with her letter evidence, whereas there were hundreds of cases in which women really needed a divorce – those were the cases that should be taken to the Supreme Court. She explained this to her manager with no result. Sheela's job was on contract and she was promised a flat in nice area and she agreed finally. She gave all the documents and her signature on a blank sheet with two conditions: her interests should be taken care of and she should be shown the copy of the petition before it was filed with the Supreme Court.

According to Sheela, neither of her conditions were fulfilled. To her shock, she read about her petition, with her and her husband's names mentioned, in a newspaper. She had not known about the publicity related to Supreme court cases. She felt cheated and abused. Moreover, she was also sorry for her husband, who was, after all, her daughter's father and who had just helped Sheela out with his letter. Now his "conversion" and "a new marriage" were all over the papers as facts. Sheela wanted to withdraw her case immediately but her Supreme Court lawyer, hired by the women's organisation, refused to do it because *"it was a prestigious issue for her. If the case won, her name would automatically go down in history as if she is responsible for changing a Christian law",* Sheela explained. Disappointed Sheela wrote a letter to her Supreme Court lawyer, to her employer and to the editor of the paper which had misrepresented the facts by writing about her husband's 'new marriage'. Moreover, with the

help of her third lawyer, Sheela made a petition to the Chief Justice of India himself in order to withdraw the earlier Supreme Court petition and sent a copy of the petition to her Supreme Court lawyer, to her employer and to the editor of the paper. In her petition, Sheela gave all the details about her case as well as the photocopies of the correspondence between her and her Supreme Court lawyer, the women's organisation and the editor on the subject. Sheela revealed how the petition was filed without her approval and that her lawyer refused to withdraw the petition despite Sheela's insistence. The Chief Justice of India replied by giving the order to dismiss the petition in question as the petitioner did not want to prosecute it. After the episode, the women's organisation terminated Sheela's working contract by stating that she should not enter the working premise: her work as well as her salary would be sent to her home. She did not receive either, nor did she get the flat she was promised earlier. At this point, Sheela was so upset and angry about the woman's organisation that she filed a complaint for illegal termination of her working contract before the Assistant Labour Commissioner of Bangalore – a complaint which was successful. After half a year the organisation was ordered to pay Sheela a ten-month salary, provide a fund and a supplement of 5000 rupees. *"Up till then nobody from any organisation had ever gone before the labor commission. I was the first person to question them [the organisation], otherwise they just hire and fire."* With a help of her third lawyer – that good but *"greedy"*one – Sheela filed a fresh divorce petition in the High Court of Karnataka. Within four days, divorce and the custody of the child were ordered for her. Sheela still had to wait for six more months and to submit her final petition in order to make the custody order 'absolute', so that she could take her daughter to United States without her husband's permission. At that point, Sheela was satisfied – despite the hardship she had finally got what she wanted.

All in all, the process took about six years. Throughout these years Sheela's daughter was at boarding school although she disliked it. Meanwhile Sheela's brother, who had promised to take Sheela and her daughter to United States, had gone through two divorces and become an alcoholic. Tragically for Sheela, he never fulfilled his commitment. Sheela recalled:

> I thought I could go there. I thought in America nobody will interfere in a single woman's life... So I thought, if I go to America I can work and

> support myself with respect and people will not treat me badly because I am divorced.... Because my brother said he would take me to United States, I went through the whole trauma of divorce. I did it with a hope that I could have a better life if I went to America. Otherwise I might have just lived separately and then thought perhaps some day he might change. I always believed, I am always optimistic, thinking tomorrow will be better. But it never really happened that way.

Thus, in the end, Sheela was divorced and she had custody of her child, yet, she was living in India without a job, money, the maintenance from her husband or a place to live. Nevertheless, she had gained experience and talents that she used in other ways that I will examine more at the end of this chapter. Sheela's court battle illustrates the series of actions that may take place when events are redefined in legal terms, when relationships are measured against the rules for such persons and when normative statements as well as final judgments are posed by actors vested with authority, such as judges (Merry 1994, 36).

First of all, Sheela used the law as a resource in order to cut her marital bond through the granting of a divorce decree and, subsequently, to achieve her other, main goal: to move to live in the United States with her daughter in accordance with her brother's promise and condition. Furthermore, she sought the absolute custody of her child in order to strengthen the bond between the mother and child and to weaken the bond between the father and child, so, that the husband could not interfere in their lives and plans of moving to United States. Later, she agreed to demands of the manager of her employer, the woman's organisation who, together with an ambitious lawyer, used law as a resource in order to contest the unjust and outdated Christian legislation, to promote its reform with a Supreme Court case and, to achieve their other goals: to get publicity for women's issues and for the organisation, for the manager and for the lawyer (the goals of the person in charge and the lawyer, according to Sheela); and to prolong a work contract and to get a flat in a nice area (the goals of Sheela). Finally, Sheela used the law as a resource by withdrawing her Supreme Court case, demonstrably in order to seek justice and to correct the wrong done by her employer, the Supreme Court lawyer and the editor. For the same reasons, she filed a complaint against her employer before the Assistant Labor Commissioner of Bangalore. By the same token, she also wanted to promote the rights of workers in other organisations and increase their security in relation to their

employers. Thus, the search of justice or truth became a main issue only in her later legal battles.

As mentioned earlier, as part of the power struggle, the law is not an equal resource: both the essence of the law and the position of the applicant influence the result of the struggle. As an educated woman of a wealthy and cultured family, Sheela had the talent, courage and network to pursue her court case. In fact, the essence of the Christian legislation in her main legal battle to getting a divorce did not allowed her to stick to the "truth" as she did not – or could not prove to have – sufficient grounds for a divorce. As Sheela stated, she wanted a divorce because her husband did not support her and her daughter financially, however, she was supposed to prove her husband's cruelty and adultery in order to get a divorce. Thus, the essence of law itself was a restriction to Sheela's aims.

As Merry (1994, 36) states, in the public performances provided by the courts, rules are bent, folded and applied to a quotidian realm of social life. However, the manuscript of the events as well as the interpretations of them must be based on contemporary legislation – it defines their framework– and the lawyers are supposed to be the masters at operating within this framework. They have a significant role in producing documents and in acting as a mediator between an applicant and a judge. Thus, they have lot of power and an applicant is 'in their hands'. In the beginning Sheela learnt, through lawyers, how to get her case filed in Bangalore, however, even then she was misled by her own lawyers, first, purposefully at her husband's request and then due to a lawyer's incompetence or carelessness. Hirsh and Lazarus-Black (1994, 15) point out that some people learn new rhetorical strategies and the language of the law through their encounters with legal institutions, whereas most learn them by hearing and speaking about the legal processes. Sheela learnt in both ways and she also learnt other legal strategies well, as an educated and talented woman working in women's organisation. When she learnt 'the name of the game', she as well her husband with his "farewell"-letter played by the game's rules, although sometimes unwillingly, in order to achieve her goals. Furthermore, while the legal process went on Sheela's dependence on her lawyers lessened and she took charge of her own process and knew how to progress. She even – by learning from her previous experiences – resisted exploitation by lawyers, by dismissing them, by not applying the maintenance of which her *"greedy"* lawyer would

have requested a share, and by humiliating her Supreme Court lawyer with her petition and reasoning, directly submitted, to the Chief Justice of India.

Moreover, Sheela's case illustrates the power of words and the potential of them to be mutable and manipulated in legal procedures. Once words were recorded in the court transcripts or in the petition they became irrevocable and the law's tool for searching for the truth, even though they could be filed or recorded in error. They could not be easily replaced or neutralised by applying the reason of "oversight" (in Sheela's original application) or that of a technical mistake (of the court typist mixing maid servant and male servant). Although Sheela's lawyer brought a huge English dictionary into court in order to support her interpretation of words, the judge had the final power to decide the argument *("adultery means penetration").* As Smart (1989, 11) reasons, some would say that 'the law is what the judges say'. Finally, one well-formulated letter by Sheela's husband changed the situation to the furtherance of Sheela's aims.

Sheela's court processes created multiple paradoxes, rooted in unequal power relations. First of all, the whole farce of proving adultery was based on the revised, yet unequal legislation for Christians, The Indian divorce Act, 1869. Nevertheless, the attempt to challenge and to change that law created a far bigger farce, or tragedy for Sheela. Although Sheela herself suffered from the inequality of the law, she did not want to contest it as a person because as a person she wanted to get her case settled as fast as possible.[156] Besides she – in contrast to many other Christian women – did not need the Supreme Court or law reform as her case was just about to be decided and finally settled. Nevertheless, persuaded by her employer, she stepped into the process. Moreover, as Smart (1989, 138) argues, in resorting to the law, especially a law structured on patriarchal precedents, women risk invoking power that will work against them rather than for them (see also Hirsh 1994). Paradoxically, the power working against Sheela was invoked by an ambitious women's organisation, its person in charge and its lawyer – all fighting for "the women",

[156] Similarly Vatuk (2006, 219-220) argues in her study of domestic violence and marital breakdown in India, that abused women's seek help from family, from a religious or community dispute-settlement body or from the state but are rarely engaged in an effort to question the patriarchal values of their society or the society's approved model for the husband-wife relationship. Instead, the women are simply trying to improve their personal situation as a wife in a particular marriage. However, their individually motivated "agentive" actions may contribute, in the long run, to changes in the cultural expectations ofband-wife behaviour (ibid.).

yet also stepping on this one particular woman in the process. As Pathak and Rajan (1992, 273), who have analysed the famous Shahbano -court case (see earlier) point out, the resistance initiated by an individual subject, as in Shahbano's case, can frequently move out of her control and even out of the area of her concerns – reducing her to a mere bone of contention among conflicting groups, particularly in religious-political issues. Sheela – the model of a discriminated-against woman – was finally fighting alone against her women's organisation employer and against a "women's issue". Instead, she placed herself into a group of discriminated-against organisation workers and promoted their rights along with her own interests and, by winning her case, became a model for them. In fact, Sheela's big, intended and calculated legal victory was her victory over her employer but, nevertheless, it was far from her original goal of getting a divorce from her husband.

The final results of Sheela's main legal battle were exactly what she wanted in the first place – divorce from her husband and absolute custody of her child. However, they turned out to be paradoxical when connected to the reality of life outside of the court room. When Sheela's brother could not fulfil his promise of taking Sheela and her daughter to the United States, both the decrees lost their value for Sheela. Intending to the United States, Sheela had not even applied for maintenance or alimony from her husband. Instead, she had lost her job and regular salary due to the legal battles. Although she got some compensation from the labor commissioner, her financial security was almost non-existent. Thus she was at the same point where she had started the whole process because, to quote her, *"My main fight was that he [the husband] did not support me."* Thus, Sheela's main, practical goal was to ensure financial security for her and for her daughter via a divorce and via settling in United States, where she could have easily worked and supported herself. Moreover, although Sheela had struggled on behalf of her daughter to get them better lives in United States, six years of the daughter being at boarding school had weakened the bond between them and complicated their relationship, which Sheela later came to realize. The final paradox arose, as the years went by. Sheela's daughter and her ex-husband Felix became very close and the daughter moved away, to live with her father. Even Sheela admitted that Felix became a very loving and caring father to his daughter. Meanwhile Felix's business also became successful and he turned into a wealthy man. While at the top of his career, he died all of

a sudden. Sheela, being legally divorced from him, did not – of course – inherit anything. However, her now adult daughter inherited a house. Sheela moved into her ex-husband's house, together with her daughter, and after years of *"gypsy-living*", Sheela finally had a permanent house and home to live in. Nevertheless, whenever Sheela and her daughter had a quarrel, the daughter reminded Sheela that she [Sheela] was living in *her* house and that as Sheela had divorced, *she* did not have any right to live in the house. If the daughter wanted, Sheela would have to move out of the house. Thus, in a way, Sheela's ex-husband succeeded in strengthening the bond between the father and child and to mark that bond by giving his daughter a house which in turn strengthened the bond between the daughter and the mother by making the mother very dependent on the daughter, which was not the solution Sheela had strived for.

On the whole, a six-year long court process and its results had an impact on Sheela's self-representations and self-construction as a relational person – as I will explore in more depth later together with an analysis of the other divorced and separated women. However, I will now present how the other women used the law as a resource in order to regulate their social relatedness, i.e., to cut or maintain their marital bonds, and in order to seek justice. What kind of paradoxes and restrictions did they face due to the unequal nature of the law? Moreover, I will look at what kinds of strategies the women used in order to overcome them.

Disputed "Truths" and Repulsive Court Practices

Unreliable Documents

As soon as the women stepped into the legal process, they experienced that discovering the "truth" and acting out the final "justice" was close to an illusion. Accordingly, the women pointed out that my method of studying the court records was useless if I wanted to learn what had *really* happened in the people's marriages. In the beginning, I was quite confused when I went through the files relating to cases of which I had no previous knowledge. A file of one court case consisted of all the documents related to it: petitions, objections, legal notices, affidavits, process memos, reports of the counsellor, evidence, a list of evidence, witness statements and orders – sometimes dozens, sometimes more than two

hundred pages of different documents. Usually the documents produced by a petitioner and a respondent were in complete contrast. Consequently, if one was right then the other must have lied throughout the process. For example, in the first file (Mc 505/91) that I went through, the petitioner husband sought divorce from the respondent wife on the grounds of cruelty and desertion. In the petition, the husband stated that the wife *"did not perform her marital obligations"*, *"called the petitioner impotent without any idea of truth", "picked quarrels with the petitioner's mother"* and finally *"left the matrimonial house without any reason and has not returned"*. In the objections, the respondent wife stated that *"the marriage was never consummated due to the impotence of the petitioner*", the petitioner was *"mistreating*" the respondent *"with the use of filthy language", "by picking quarrels", "by beating"* her and finally *"by driving the respondent away from his [and her] house"*. Meanwhile the wife filed her petition for maintenance. Both parties produced medical certificates about the husbands testosterone and semen analysis although the husband's *"original certificate that he sought to produce had been mixed up with other papers and hence they could not be filed in time."* According to the family counsellor's statement "*the wife is not prepared to go back and the husband is not prepared to pay any maintenance. No reconciliation is possible."* Later, the husband changed his lawyer and withdrew his petition. Thus, the divorce petition was dismissed as withdrawn, whereas the wife's maintenance was approved and the husband was ordered to pay his wife 750 rupees per month and 2000 rupees for the litigation expenses. This case was settled within a year and three months but often the procedures were longer and the case more complicated. Therefore, studying the court documents did not inform me of *"what had really happened"* but I learnt about the legal discourses, language and the procedures of the court and, more importantly, about the contradictions the women faced, particularly when many of them had approached the court in order to get *"some justice"*. Furthermore, reading the evidence, such as the personal letters of petitioner or respondent, gave me concrete examples how the court process turns private issues into the public issues.

Public Humiliation

The divorced and separated women described the court process as a big play or a drama – just like many anthropologists (e.g. Merry 1994; Moore 1994; Phillips 1994) have done. According to Merry (ibid 1994

37), 'court performances' rely on specialized costumes (suits and robes), the demarcation of space (the public area, legal counsels' area, and the judge's bench), specialised language and the presence gatekeepers. Together these suggest a greater affinity to religion than to a play. In consequence, the women were supposed to act according to this play or 'ritual manuscript' although the basic structure, the language and the code of conduct of the legal procedures were totally strange to the women, especially at the beginning. Moreover, the women needed to learn to put up with the practices and routines of the family court. According to the women, if their case was contested, they were forced to bear the humiliation of hearing all kind of lies about their marriages, about their character and about their family members in front of the personnel and clients of the Family Court. The women regarded this deceit until they got used to it. Moreover, many husbands hid their income in the maintenance cases, which obviously complicated the procedure.

The unpredictability of court schedules was a headache, particularly for those women who had a regular job but it also restricted every woman's lives in one way or another. In the Family Court of Bangalore, the clients were given only the procedure dates, not times. In practice, a particular case could be announced and handled at any time between 11am to 2 pm and 3pm to 5pm. Therefore the women were obliged to take time or days off from their jobs or their other daily routines and to spend the day in the Family Court waiting for their case to be handled. However, even then they often came or waited for nothing. The case was postponed if the husband, the woman's lawyer or the husband's lawyer did not turn up, if the court was too busy to handle all the cases, or if the judge was sick or on leave. Sometimes months passed and despite the women's continual court visits their cases did not progress at all. As a general rule, one single contested case required numerous court visits over the years. Veena[157] counted that during the past five years she had visited the court more than fifty times and her case was still ongoing.

Due to the unpredictable court schedules, waiting in the Family Court became a depressing and humiliating routine for the women. The court was the place the women had learnt to avoid earlier: it was for criminals, not for a decent Indian woman. Although the Family Court acted as an independent court, it was situated in the City Civil Court Complex where all kinds of disputes were settled. Some women felt that they were

[157] H, 33, u, d, 1c.

forced to sit and wait in the middle of *"all kind of criminals"*. Moreover, while waiting together with other women, the women became part of this anonymous group of "the women in court" or "deserted women" or "divorcing women". Some upper-middle class women felt they were being associated with the wrong kind of women, *"the servant class of women"* they wanted to differentiate themselves from. Other women suffered while hearing other women's heartbreaking stories or observing how their cases were handled in court. They realised how badly other women were treated in their marriages and even now in court: they were not taken seriously or treated with respect. Though these women felt empathy for the other women, they also became even more frustrated or discouraged about their own case or in their belief in *"justice"*.

Dependency on the Personnel

The women were dependent on their lawyers who knew the rules and regulations and, even more importantly, the unspoken practices of the court. The lawyers guided the women's performances and behaviour in court – what they should say and how they should behave and look like. Some women recalled how even lawyers not concerned with their case had reprimanded them – one because she spoke too loud and cheerfully while waiting her turn outside the court room (with me) and the other because she had crossed her leg on her knee and, supposedly this showed disrespect in the courtroom. According to the Family Court Act 1984, lawyers are not to be present in the courtroom. The judge may, however, allow parties to be represented by a lawyer if there are complicated questions of law involved in the case (Dutta 1996, 282). In practice, the lawyers sought the permission of the court for their presence in every case and these requests were always allowed in Bangalore, as cited by the Judge of the Family Court of Bangalore.[158] As a result, the lawyers appeared to be the main characters in the courtroom and there were always many of them present there. They created drama for the court audience composed of other lawyers, court personnel, clients and the judge. As Smart (1989, 11) argues, for the legal system to run smoothly, the ideal is that all parties are legally represented and that they say as little as possible (i.e. they are mute) because the problem for the lawyer is that the litigant may bring in issues which are not, in legal terms, pertinent to the

[158] Interview with the Judge of the Family Court, 31.12.1999.

case or s/he may inadvertently say something that has a legal significance unknown to her/him. Thus, law exercises power also in its ability to devalue non-legal knowledge and experience as suspect and/or secondary (ibid.,11).

The lawyers had a lot of power in the handling of cases as they filtered and interpreted the law. They selected the facts of everyday experience worth presenting in a particular application and translated them into the legal language, fitting them into the legal discourse and having legal relevance. They knew, for example, how to produce 'cooked up stories' if needed. One woman narrated to me that her good friend and litigating lawyer had asked her if she really thinks *"that the cases are won on facts. They are won on fiction. Whoever constructs the better fiction will win the case."* One lawyer explained to me that everybody is lying, *"creating cock-and-bull stories"* in court. While doing so, however, it, the lawyer should be sensible and know the limits because if they got caught lying they might lose the case or at least they could not demand what they wanted. According to the lawyer, it was impossible to know the truth, and for the own client's sake one had to lie – but only a little bit. Another lawyer refused to talk about *"lies"* but talked about *"false statements"* or *"the statement that failed to be proved"* and thus circumvented the real issue of truth and sheltered herself in the legal discourse. Many women felt that these peculiar interpretations of facts made the proceedings repulsively unpredictable – anything could be expected. This also restricted some women's lives. They, like Pushpa[159], stayed at home or restricted their contacts, particularly with men – no matter how innocent such contact with colleagues, friends, neighbours would be – in order to avoid giving their ex-husbands any slight hint of something that they, with their lawyers, could enlarge and distort in order to use against the women.

Some women found a good and experienced lawyer with the help of a women's organisation, friends or relatives, whereas other women's lawyers were too busy, expensive, or careless. One woman received dubious proposals from unknown male lawyers while waiting for her turn in the Family Court, and another knew incidents in which the male lawyers had tried to *"take advantage of the women's vulnerable position*" by first being helpful but then start visiting the women's homes with dubious intentions. *"Some lawyers take money from both sides,"* Sheela[160] assured me.

[159] H, 30, m, d/j-, 2c.
[160] C, 54, m, d/j, 1c.

In fact, some women believed that their husbands had either persuaded or bribed their lawyers after they had suddenly taken a totally different view of the case. For this reason, Veena changed her lawyer three times until she finally approached a retired family friend, a lawyer, whom she deeply trusted, but hesitated to contact earlier *"in this kind of case."* According to Veena, her husband managed to bribe not only the lawyers and one judge but also the court clerk, who used to give her the wrong court dates, to confuse given dates with "spelling mistakes" and to "forget" to announce the case in court. Finally the woman complained to the principal judge about him and the judge put him in order.

The women were also dependent on the other personnel of the family court, for example, on family counsellors who led compulsory but, according to the women "*useless*", counselling for the couple. In such short counselling session, a marriage counsellor met the couple together and asked questions about their marriage and marital problems in order to ascertain whether any reconciliation was possible. The counsellor I interviewed explain to me – as she did to each couple in counselling – that as long as she sees any slight hope for a reunion she would request a judge to order a new counselling meeting for the couple. The counselling session that I followed was characterised a the lack of privacy: not only me but three visiting counsellors and three different passers-by – court staff bringing in documents or using the bathroom which was situated in the room to, for example, wash their lunch boxes and one women was just sitting and listening and sometimes glancing her watch without any explanation. She followed and sometimes even commented on the counselling or the couple's highly personal problems (intimate relations, alcoholism, violence, jealously, affected family relations). Furthermore, the main counsellor made her professionalism and authority visible in many ways: the counsellor controlled the length and content of the session, she acted as a moderator and interrupted the clients even in the middle of their sentence by appointing a new meeting as "*this quarrelling does not lead anywhere.* She revealed the client's lawyer's chicane, evaluated the cases and gave sometimes preference to one side (usually to a wife) for example, by commenting: *"Don't worry. He does not have proper grounds for divorce, so you can lengthen the process with your lawyer for years and meanwhile he can not get remarried."* Moreover, the counsellor commented on cases and discussed them with her visiting colleagues, in the presence of the clients. For example, one visiting colleague so commented on one

case "*this wife is a doctor so her husband has an inferiority complex and he wants her to be some kind of ideal wife that does not exist in reality,"* and the counsellor nodded in agreement. Finally, she drew final conclusions by recommending a new appointment or by stating that *"reconciliation has failed."* The counsellors, who were often former judges but sometimes also professional counsellors, had a lot of power as they could postpone the whole process by giving new counselling appointments for as long as they wanted (see also Agnes 1996, 290). Furthermore, if the couple was called for a new counselling session, they seldom met the same counsellor but started again, from the beginning with a new counsellor. The meetings were therefore repetitions and often without progress. Consequently, the women considered such counselling appointments useless and frustrating, irrespective of whether they wanted to continue with their marriage or not.

Furthermore, the most powerful person with the greatest influence on the women's lives was the judge of the court. The judge had the final power to evaluate the events and draw conclusions based on his interpretation of contemporary legal measures and legislation. Moreover, the judge did not only draw the final conclusion on cases but directed cases, the personnel and clients with his advise and comments, if needed.

Taken together, the procedure, personnel, and the organisation of the court itself enact a drama which conveys a message about the social hierarchy, authority and order (Arno 1985). As Merry (1994, 53, 37) points out, the court officials filter and interpret the law and serve as core actors in imposing it: together they produce the cultural messages and interpretations an enactment of the dominant ideology that also reflects their practices and perspectives. Furthermore, this cultural message is reinforced by the other practices of the court. Lazarus-Black (2001) noted the ways in which battered women in the Trinidadian courts "produce and perform agency" in their confrontations with the law are moulded and constrained both by the structures of the law and the judicial system that very often prevent petitioners from obtaining what the state purports to offer them as well as by the structures of power and the ideologies of gender that are deeply embedded in society at large (see also Vatuk 2006). Accordingly, the divorced and separated women received paradoxical and contradictory messages in the Family court of Bangalore. In principle, the law offered them an opportunity seek justice or to obtain a divorce, maintenance, custody of the child/children or, even, the

restitution of conjugal rights but in practice dealing with the personnel as well as with the practices and routines of the Family Court made the accessing of these opportunities a difficult and sometimes impossible, but always an unpleasant task. In consequence, the state and society gave the women the double message of allowing them (and their husbands) to break their marital bond and yet preserving their marital bond by adopting a complicated process. Moreover, the hierarchy of the court was made clear to women who considered themselves to be at the bottom of it, together with *"other criminals"* – even the court peon [a messenger/attendant in court] could nickname them and unknown lawyers could make unpleasant remarks or suggestions. All in all, most of the women considered the whole process itself as some kind of unjustifiable punishment or, at least, as a final ordeal that they were forced to go through because of their ex-husbands: either he initiated the process or they were forced to initiate it because of him.

The Women's Efforts to Facilitate the Legal Process

The women used different strategies in order to avoid those difficulties or to carry on their cases despite them. Some women who wanted to cut their marital bonds tried to ease and shorten the court process by seeking a divorce by 'mutual consent'. As mentioned earlier, a divorce by 'mutual consent' was by far the easiest way to obtain a divorce. At the time of my fieldwork, it was permitted for Hindus, Parsis, Muslims and for those who had a civil marriage[161], and it was utilised by my informants who were Hindu or married in a civil procedure. For them, the requirements were that the couple had to have been living apart for at least one year and that they would re-apply for their mutual petition after six months and within 18 months of the submission of the mutual petition (see e.g. Law of Domestic Violence 2001, 29; Diwan 1998, 175.). If one of the couple withdrew her/his petition or did not turn up to the court re-apply for it by the given date or at least within the required time period, the whole process fell through and divorce was dismissed. However, if the couple followed the procedure it required only a couple of court visits and a half-year waiting period.

[161] Under Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936, Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939 and Special Marriage Act, 1954 (Jaising (ed.) 2001, xl, 30).

Even the women's organisation that I knew best had begun to recommend it to their clients. After years of experience in long and bitter court fights with poor results, they now put all their effort into seeking negotiations between the spouses in order to settle the case *before* it went to court. In some cases they even sought compensation for the women mainly by *"talking sense"* to the husband, but also by using other strategies such as making police complaints in order to reveal the seriousness of the situation. The organisation found this way of settling and then finalising or "stamping" the matter in the form of a 'mutual consent' divorce in court to be far more sensitive and constructive from the women's perspective. They, much like the women without organisational support, their lawyers or mediators would persuade the husband to agree to a mutual consent divorce by appealing to the husband's chances of remarriage after the divorce decree. If the husband was convinced that his wife would never return, after a divorce decree he could at least freely remarry. The women felt that time was on their side: sooner or later their husbands would want to remarry. The other way to persuade the husband to agree to a mutual divorce was by reminding him of the women's possibility of making a police complaint about "dowry harassment" or by actually making a complaint because a dowry demand or increased unmet dowry demands by the husband and his family was often one area of marital problems, as described earlier (in Chapter 4).[162] Usually the husband's condition for 'mutual consent' was that the woman gives up her demand for maintenance.[163]

Usually, a 'mutual consent' divorce was the final outcome of long negotiations or compromises below the surface. Moreover, it was not necessarily so "mutual" after all. For example, Shanti Devi[164] described her moments of horror when she met her mentally unstable, dangerously violent husband in court after the submission of a mutual petition fol-

[162] Due to publicity concerning severe dowry related problems, the women and their husbands were also aware about the legislature addressing the problem. Both giving and taking dowry had been forbidden by law (The Dowry Prohibition Act) since 1961, and during the 1980's many proposed dowry-related legal reforms were passed in order to punish cruelty against a wife and to pay attention to the unnatural deaths of recently married women (e.g. Kumar 1998, 115-126; Ghadially & Kumar 1988, 175-77). See more Chapters 3 and 4.

[163] Moreover, if the couple are living separately by mutual consent the Court will not grant maintenance under sections 125 to 127, Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) applicable for Hindus, Christians, Parsis and people in civil marriage (Law of Domestic Violence 2001, 41).

[164] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.

lowed by a six-month waiting period. They were having a final meeting with the family counsellor when the husband suddenly announced that he did not actually want to divorce but to continue the marriage with Shanti Devi. Shocked, Shanti Devi stated that she would not in anyway continue the marriage. However, the family counsellor agreed to the husband's demand that he try to persuade his wife one last time. Even Shanti Devi's lawyer recommended that Shanti Devi let her husband talk once more but advised also that whatever the husband would say, Shanti Devi's should only answer: *"I am not interested in continuing this marriage."* For two hours, the husband tried to persuade Shanti Devi with same words and gestures as earlier during their marital life –he could not live without her, he loved her, he would never hurt her again. The husband repeated these promises sometimes bending on his knees, and Shanti Devi replied again and again, *"I am not interested in continuing this marriage."* Finally Shanti Devi could not bear the situation any more. She called her lawyer who succeeded in convincing the husband to sign the papers. Within the same day, the judge announced a divorce order for them. However, even after the judge's statement, the husband commented, "*Within two months she will come back to me. You will all see."* Thus, even here the final order did not tell "truth" about the partners' "real" willingness either to continue or discontinue the marriage. In most of the cases, one of the couple in fact wanted to continue the marriage but had given up the hope and finally agreed to a divorce by mutual consent against his/her "actual" consent.

On the other hand, the women who did not want to divorce did not have any shorter or easier court process to choose from, as Pushpa's example illustrated. In any case, the women learned ways to lessen the inconvenience of the court visits. Some came to court with a brother, a father or a good friend, who kept them company and made them feel secure while waiting. One stopped talking to other women and following their court cases after she realised how much the problems of others actually affected her own state of mind. Another recalled how she had probably looked *"very proud"* during her court visits: she used to read silently and keep her eyes only on her book throughout the court sessions except during the moments when her case was handled. Thus, they carried along the beneficial interaction with a father, a brother, a friend, or even a book to the court. This protected them against the harmful or inauspicious interaction which they sought to reduce or interrupt

by isolating themselves. Furthermore, all women became cynical when they learned 'the name of the game.' The woman, who was first shocked by her husband's public statements about her character, narrated how she calmed down when she learned how common such a statement was in the court. Moreover, she understood that everyone in the court was somehow involved in the court process as well, and so they would not take any statement "as truth" but as a part of someone's strategy.

The court process as a whole influenced the women's ways of experiencing the final judgement as well as the women's ways of coping with it. In the following sections, I will show how the women commented on their final divorce decree and what meanings the women gave to it, particularly in relation to their marital bond. I will also seek to answer the question: What was the overall meaning the of court process for the women's lives, self-representations and self-construction as relational persons of South India?

Conclusion: The Implications of the Legal Battle for Self-Construction

For the women who wanted to cut their marital bonds and their connections to their husbands the legal divorce decree was a victory, or at least a relief. They described their feelings of freedom or happiness on the day of the legal decree of divorce. On the other hand, the women who had wanted to preserve their marital bonds considered a legal divorce decree either as a misery or the inevitable result of a hopeless process. A divorce decree finally ended the women's hopes of reunion. Some women described deep feelings of loss and emptiness on the day of the final divorce order: they were depressed, crying alone, they could not eat or work for a long time or they felt that their *"life was over"*. Nevertheless, some of them also considered the final divorce decree to be somehow unburdening: no more court visits. If the woman won maintenance or other compensation, it made it easier for her to accept the divorce. Moreover, they could finally plan something for the future.

The court process can be interpreted as complicated, modern 'rite of passage' a woman is obliged to go through in order to become a divorcee. Nevertheless, it is a controversial and paradoxical process. A woman meets other divorcing and divorced women with whom they share space,

time and similar life situation in the court. Although some women may maintain a conscious distance from the other women, considering them the "*wrong kind of people*", even they keep hearing about the other cases and reflecting on their own case through them. Above all, they recognize that they are not exceptions. The court is crowded with women having similar experiences and going through a divorce or other related court processes. The women may end up realising that the others have even more severe problems or slimmer chances to win and overcome their difficulties. Furthermore, by making use of the idea that persons and selves are connected substantially with other people, places and things of their worlds in India and that by means of substantial transactions with other persons people are thought to absorb and give out a part of themselves (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriott 1990; see earlier chapters) I suggest that the women exchange something of themselves with each other in the court through interaction while they advise and console each other, sit side by side, watching and listening to each other's court performances, waiting for their turns etc. They mainly exchange words – or sometimes only anonymous stories mediated by the court personnel – but as those words and stories are based on personal experiences that only other women in a similar situation can best understand, that exchange has significance for the women's self-construction. At least, the long and drawn out ritualised court process gives each and every woman the time to cut her marital bond, little by little, and to adjust to her new situation. It allows a woman to come to terms with her divorce and the breaking of the marital connection, issues which are essential if she wants to move on from the transitory phase and to reconstruct her life. Moreover, the process itself shapes the meanings the women attribute to their divorce, for example, after a full-time court struggle for years and years, a woman places a great importance on her divorce decree.

On the other hand, some separated women assured me that they "*did not need*" any legal decree to cut off their marital connection totally. They said they were divorced "*in their hearts*" or *"emotionally*" and marked their "divorce" by removing toe rings, bindi and/or tali. According to Mehrotra's (2003, 206) study of single mothers, an exceptionally large number of marriages in India remain suspended in a state of separation for years. Nevertheless, some of the women of my study had been very firm-minded on the "*uselessness*" of the divorce order had in fact got di-

vorced when I met them again five years later. Manika[165] had found a new partner with whom she was planning to get married. Sulabha[166] had moved to live together openly with her still-married partner with whom she had had a permanent but secret relationship already five years earlier. She thought being officially divorced would secure her position in the new situation. Madhu[167] had a government job and, most importantly, had recently constructed a house. By means of a legal divorce decree, after 20-years of separation, she wanted to insure that her ex-husband would not benefit from her house or job if she passed away before him. Moreover, her business-oriented ex-husband's potential debts would not create problems for her. For Madhu, the threshold of initiating the court process was high and when she did at last do it and got her divorce decree her father had cynically asked *"what do you do with that certificate?"* In fact, Madhu rejoiced over it, if people asked her *"who she was"*, she could finally simply say *"divorced"* without any further explanations. These women's accounts illustrate that the decision of avoiding the court and the option of divorce also had its impact on the women's lives, although the women tended to understate it. Only later, when they had changed their mind, did they reveal a discontent that was often related to the unclear position of separated women. They are not married anymore and, yet, they can not consider themselves to be free either. Their position remains more open to questions and explanations. Instead, the court process provides a woman with the final divorce decree order, a document that clearly states her status as divorced. Furthermore, each step of the process is documented and sealed as a certified document. These documents women may save as tangible proof of their status and as evidence of the process they have gone through.

Nevertheless, even a court decree could not ensure a *total* break of the marital bond for *every* woman. For example, Veena[168] described how, due to her "*religious mentality*" and in spite of her soon-to-be legal divorce decree, "*spiritually*" she was still a wife and she still had her ex-husband's image in her mind "*as her husband*" and she could not remove it or change it – it would be the same as asking a vegetarian girl to eat meat. Till the day he died, she would perform the rituals of a married woman

[165] H, 27, m, s/u, 0c /1996 + H, 31, m, d/j, 0c /2000.
[166] H, 31, u, s/u, 1c /1996 + H, 35, u, d/j, 1c /2000.
[167] H, 38, m, s/u, 0c /1996 + H, 42, m, d/j, 0c/2000.
[168] H, 33, u, d, 1c.

and wear a *tali*. Thus, she still followed the *dharma* of the wifely devotion and had not experienced "the turning point" described earlier (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, despite their new official status as divorced women, many of the women refused to call or think of themselves as such. Being a divorcee was so negatively valued both in public and in the women's minds that even their own experiences, for example, of being decent and divorced or being divorced without reason, were not enough to change that. One woman preferred to identify herself as *"a deserted woman"*, a second as a *"single woman"* and another explained how she never wanted to think of herself as a divorced woman, *"I just think that this thing has happened to me, and now I have to forget it."*

Furthermore, although the status and position of both a widow and a single woman are dubious in India, particularly, if a widow is fairly young (defined as not yet in her menopause) and if a single is fairly old (at the age that she should be already married), some divorced women none-theless so chose to describe themselves as widowed or single. Those divorced women whose ex-husbands later died, considered widowhood to be a "promotion" in their status. Widowhood is a structural definition and it represents a socially, culturally and ritually marked position while living without the husband. To a divorcee becoming a widow makes them ordinary again– after all the women do eventually become widows in India. Even Sheela who got her divorce decree after the long and dramatic court battle described earlier in this chapter and who seemed to be proud or at least conscious of being properly divorced[169] re-formulated her status and self-representation after her ex-husband died: *"Here, wherever I go, they ask about my husband. Now I can say he is dead. That has more respect than saying I am divorced."* Moreover, these women did not consider their new widowhood illogical. For them, being divorced did not exclude being a widow, for example, Manjula introduced herself to me as *"both divorced and widowed"*. I found it, nevertheless, contradictory: if a woman's connections and mental and legal ties were totally cut off from her ex-husband, how could she become a widow?

Similarly, although being a single adult woman is a somewhat awkward status, it is not exactly unique as there are groups of educated, career oriented women who get married in their thirties or forties, if ever, in multinational IT-industry cities such as Bangalore. Thus, the court

[169] She also doubted whether I got *"correct"* data from the women who were *"only separated"*.

decree of divorce was an important backup for the women who started to present themselves as *"single"* and of whom some wanted to remarry. Furthermore, the women who had children emphasised their "motherhood". Those women whose children were living with their father particularly used the court process of applying for custody and/or visiting rights as a resource in order to prove and use as evidence of their love to their children and, to also build up their self-representation as a caring mother. The court process made that self-representation visible to other people, to the children, the relatives, the friends, and the neighbours and the court documents served as a proof of the bond and as manifestation of their self-representation as caring and loving mother. All in all, the positions of being single, a widow and a mother are all considered more decent in regard to a woman's sexuality: in the first case sexuality is yet to *so* "awaken" and in the second case it is already *somehow* "suppressed" and in the third case it is *somehow* in the control of the children. In contrast, a divorced women's sexuality is stereotypically considered to be awakened, alive, and free – and therefore uncontrolled and dangerous. As Sheela noted, *"Even my own friends start doubting me and start thinking that I am going to snatch their husbands."* Thus, the women used the above self-representations to "protect" them from such suspicions.

Marital breakdown is still taboo and the women do not have any cultural or social model explaining what it is like to be divorced. Thus, they have to create their own model and to make use of positional variation and a range of self-representations – that of the widow, the single woman, the mother – as described above. In fact, separated and divorced women do not necessarily seek "ideal" positions and self-definitions, yet, they seek better, potential, suitable, acceptable and respectable positions and statuses. The flexibility and "fluidity" of the relational persons' self-constructions (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriot 1976; and earlier Chapters) facilitate women in this critical transformation to combine different elements and positions from the different stages of the female life-cycle which seemed not to be exclusive in their use: the women could become "divorced wives", "divorced widows", "divorced singles" or simply "divorced". In addition, the women who had children became "divorced mothers" either "divorced single mothers" or "divorced mothers without the children" living with them.

Furthermore, the idea of the flexibility and "fluidity" of the relational persons' self-construction (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriot 1976), the idea of

"self" as a shifting combination of roles and statues in constant reaction to the environment located within a single body (e.g. Osella & Osella 2000) and the idea of multiple, inconsistent and culturally shaped "self-representations" that people can be observed to project and use (Ewing 1990) presented earlier (see Chapter 4) are all further illustrated in the way how the divorced and separated women acted and presented themselves as "victims" and "actors" in relation to their own court process. Thus, the court process facilitates the women's efforts of constructing self-representations not only as divorced, singles, and mothers but also as "victims" and "actors": victims because of the others and actors on behalf of the others (cf. Chapter 4)

The women who lose their cases are more trapped in the portrayal of themselves as "victims." At the end of the court process, they find themselves feeling even more oppressed than ever before. Despite their efforts they have lost their marital status and therefore suffered for nothing. Thus, they represent themselves and feel not only as victims of miserable marriages but also as victims and losers of an unjust legal system. However, the total separation from the husband may push them close to the "turning point" of starting the recovery process.

On the other hand, other women turn into "the actors" during the court battle: they overcome the feelings of humiliation, they learn how to proceed with their case, they get the courage to approach authorities such as judges etc. In short, they learn how to survive in court, a part of the public world that they have had no earlier knowledge or experience of. This, together with some positive end results, gives the women a feeling of empowerment even though they often consider themselves forced into the whole process as well as their "agency". They, in fact, win over mountains of difficulties and become more confident. However, even then they carried their "victim-self-representations" along (see Chapter 4). For example, Sheela, who was the celebrated fighter of a legal battle, tactically presented herself both as "a victim" and as "an actor". Sheela, turned her divorce decree into a career. She saved every piece of her court files and other documents relating to her case as a kind of evidence. She wrote articles and gave speeches about her experiences and she was a welcomed guest on the programs of women's organisations. For a while she became a *"freelance journalist"* who mainly wrote about her own case and experience. In her article, written for the English language women's magazine, Femina, one year after the legal divorce order she used the legal discourses, calculatingly portraying the selected facts of her court

battle. The only reason she gave for her divorce was *"the demand and harassment for more dowry"*. Later, however, she listed all the grounds she *"could present in her petition for divorce"* without any further comment as to whether they were accepted as grounds for her divorce. Thus, here again the court documents were used to serve the women's own ends creatively, or manipulatively. While describing her feelings and experiences throughout the court battle she presented herself as a victim but also as an actor as follows:

> I opted to shield and soothe my wounded body and psyche by seeking a violence-free living alternative. I owed this to my daughter who had not chosen to be born in a friction-ridden violent home, where there was persistent discord and disharmony. I saw no reason to preserve my marital status for society's benefit and to sacrifice the happiness of my daughter by making her live in a world of emotional trauma.
>
> Another painful decision, once I had filed my case in court, was to send my daughter to a boarding school. ... In the circumstances, this was the best decision I could make for my daughter. I had to work, fit in court proceedings and visits to the lawyer in my day – I could not let her childhood be affected. But this separation was a major crisis in my young daughter's life. ... She learnt that suffering was a part of living, but she also learnt that difficulties could be surmounted.
>
> I lived alone during the years I fought the court proceedings. They were years of agony, turmoil and confusion, and a time of sadness, struggle and trauma. ... Divorce proceedings are expensive and possible only for the rich. Divorce is costly both financially and emotionally. But in some cases, it is necessary for survival and to retain one's sanity, emotional stability, personal worth and dignity. A woman who goes to court for a divorce is vulnerable and often exploited at every level. ... I went through the ordeal of daily trips to court, reliving the experiences which led to the break up of my marriage.
>
> I have now come to terms with myself though the experience was as shattering as my divorce proceedings. I am now redefining my values, rebuilding my shattered ego and regaining my dignity and feeling of self-worth. I am once again learning how to be productive and creative. I am learning how to make new friends and cultivate new interests. I have emerged stronger – ready to tackle the future.

As the excerpts from her article show, Sheela presented herself not only as a victim and an actor but also as a mother, a suffering victim-mother who fought for the sake of her daughter and who finally survived and became stronger. The personal growth, expressed in the last paragraph above, was linked to the daughter's well-being. As pointed out earlier (Chapter 4), in the Indian context, the women direct their "individual" actions in order to support other people and they present themselves as "actors" in relation to other people. Writing the article to the women's magazine can be interpreted as Sheela's way, among others, to construct a more adequate self-representation as "a divorcee". Also, she earned much-needed money and gained a professional identity as "freelance journalist", both important for her self-dignity. Through the same process, she also shared and gave her experience and sufferings for the "use" of or as "lessons" to other women or for their encouragement.[170]

All in all, looking at legal procedures from the women's perspective and linking the court processes and documents to the everyday lives of the women concerned, shows how the legal procedures and their results can be used, valued and interpreted in various ways. As noted by the women, the written statements of the final order do not usually give the right picture about "truth" or "reality". However, the whole court process as well as its results and its interpretations are *as such* an important part of these women's everyday lives. Despite the alternative ways of ending the marital tie and the incapability of completely cutting off the connection, the court process is, after all, a powerful way to cut and mark the dissolution of the marital bond and the law can be viewed as a resource in these processes. Actually, the women's attempts to achieve their goals (e.g., the cutting or maintaining of the marital bond, freedom, revenge, compensation, money, contact with children) by means of a decree of divorce, maintenance, custody, visiting rights or the restitution of conjugal rights, as well as the women's various ways of defining themselves as *"divorcees", "wives", "singles", "widows", "mothers", "victims" and "actors"* very well illustrate their agency and creativity as well as the flexibility embedded in the cultural constructions of personhood and gender in South India.

[170] Sheela also let me study all her documents of the court battles in order to help me and maybe to support other divorced and separated women via my study. Moreover, she had also given the documents of her legal battle against her employer for the use of the documentation centre and the women's organisation.

6. RECONSTRUCTED NATAL HOMES

Transforming Female Homes

A new home, a residence, a place to live is a marker of the divorced or separated women's success in moving out of their transitory state. Transactions of living together, eating together, sharing with, and caring for, each other make homes and construct the persons in them. As stated earlier, South Indian houses, like people, are said to be porous and constantly in flux. They are composed of "houseflows" instead of being households, according to Trawick (1996, 87-88), places where people live are better seen as points of confluence than as "holds" in any stable sense: houses are open, impermanent and people easily change residence from house to house. However, a man may potentially stay in one home and house throughout his life because of the predominant form of family organisation as the patrilineal and patrilocal joint family in South India (Karve 1997, 67). From a woman's point of view, an examination of her indigenous concept of home forces us to focus on her life cycles; especially at her birth and marriage, as Tiengtrakul (2006, 24) points out. As illustrated earlier (in Chapters 2 and 3) South Indian women have two homes and houses, i.e. their natal home and their affinal home. South Indian ethnographies emphases the importance of a woman's natal home to her throughout her life: it is not only a place to grow up but it is also place to return to after the marriage as a loved, pampered guest (e.g. Dhuruvarajan 1989, 81; Säävälä 2001, 143; Srinivas 1999, 142) or even daily visitor (Kapadia 1996, 31) or in need of protection or support, for example, in the delicate matters of controlling childbirth (e.g. Säävälä 2001, 142-143). Moreover, the two great landmarks in the sexual growth of a girl, her first menstruation and her first

parturition (and also other subsequent parturitions) often take place in the house of the mother (Trawick 1996, 195).

Marriage and the move from a natal home into an affinal home is a rite of passage for a young woman. New bonds are created and old bonds are at least weakened while a woman's personhood goes through its transformations. Women are prepared for this transformation both ritually and socially throughout their lives. As illustrated earlier (in Chapter 3, also through negation) and as Tiengtrakul (2006, 27) points out in her study on domesticity in Banarasi, the new bride has to struggle to make a place for herself within the network of complex relationships and obligations that existed in her affinal home prior to her arrival. Often only after several years and the birth of the children, does it become her own home, her *ghar*, and consequently, there is a shift in her make-up as a person (ibid.). Indian women develop their positions and their sense of belonging in their homes through "homemaking", for example as Tiengtrakul (2006, 28) illustrates, by taking on – when entrusted – more and more household responsibilities, by contributing more and more to the family's decision-making process and by becoming a caregiver of the family members. Through the different forms of homemaking, including housework, the bonds between the members of the house are recreated, maintained and also questioned. Based on a study of upper middle class housewives in Madras, Caplan (1985, 66-83) categorises the different forms of 'housework' as follows: cleaning and washing, food preparation, childcare and socialization, religious activity, maintenance of kinship relations and leisure. Cooking and feeding are particularly important forms of interaction and sharing and also play an important role in the power struggles between the people living together – both "the servitude of love" and "absolute domination" by the hostess of the house as Trawick (1996, 111-112) described it. Similarly, Kumar (2006, 69) points out that the control over domesticity, particularly the exercise of power when a woman cooks and serves, also makes women feel powerful in *their own way*, which is *the only way they know* (her italics), although from a macro perspective women are more powerless. Thus, the importance of the house and home is not solely physical but is also derived from the activities and power that it makes possible.

In general, women's transformations as well as transportations between natal homes and affinal homes are made easier due to the 'fluidity' and lack of 'essence' or 'permeable quality' that are said to charac-

terise South Asian personhood (e.g. Busby 1997a; Busby 1997b; Busby 2000; Daniel 1984; Fruzzetti et al. 1992; Trawick, 1996). Furthermore, no woman suffers when belonging to two homes (Kumar 2006, 78). In contrast, abrupt marital breakdown causes women to lose both of these homes in their original meaning. The natal home is meant to be a place for a woman to grow up, to leave once she is married, and to return as a loved guest, while the affinal home is supposed to be a woman's eventual place to live with her husband, children and husband's potential family. After losing these homes through divorce, a woman becomes "homeless", at least symbolically if not practically (see Chapter 4). She is obliged to construct herself *a third kind of home.* However, it is interesting that several scholars have challenged the idea of women's two homes by questioning whether *any* Indian woman truly has "a home of her own" at all. For example, Junghare (1998) has interpreted the speech practices and folksongs of Maharashtrian women while Raheja (1994, 59) has analysed contradictions presented in the songs and proverbs of the North Indian villages: some songs portray a woman's sense of neither belonging fully to a natal home nor conjugal home. Similarly, Dhuruvarajan (1989, 81-83) has recorded the opinions of women in her study of a village in Karnataka: "Women do not have a home of their own. They always live in someone else's house, work for someone else" (ibid. 81). Moreover, usually a son or sons inherit the house and the agricultural land and these rights are protected under the Hindu Succession Act passed in 1956 (see e.g. Basu 2001, 108; Mukhopadhyay 1998, 98-100).[171] Accordingly, while examining how the divorced and separated women construct their "third home" through *their* kind of homemaking we can concurrently analyse whether these women's "third homes" could even become an actual home of their *"own"*, potentially a new cultural category for a South Indian woman.

[171] These rights are protected in a name of Mitakshara coparcenary of a joint family or as other exemptions in the Hindu Succession Act. The basis of the laws of inheritance and succession in Muslim law is not on the joint family but on the individual. However, the main disability faced by the Muslim women is the quantum of shares allocated to them which is based on the principle of a double share for men (Mukhopadhyay 1998, 100-103; Parashar 1992, 288). Although the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 ostensibly improved the status of women by ruling that widows have the right to maintenance and that daughters can be heirs in the case of intestate succession of self-acquired property, it nevertheless emphasized that the best economic options for women lay in marriage (Basu 2001, 108-109; Mukhopadhyay 1998, 100).

In the following part of this study (Chapters 6, 7, and 8), I will explore the bonds of the divorced and separated women by looking into the post-affinal homes of those divorced and separated women who had already recovered from their most acute crises. Firstly, I will examine how the divorced and separated women construct their "third home" or potential "own home" through *their* kind of homemaking, for example, by nurturing or creating their bonds through interaction – living, feeding, sharing and caring – both inside and outside of the house and how they simultaneously reconstruct their lives, their self-representations and themselves through interaction and transactions. In the "third home" a woman is obliged to reconstruct herself after the marital breakdown – this home may be found within her natal family or from the ruins of her affinal home, or can involve a totally new place and set of relationships. The broken marital bond changes the substance and the status of the woman and she, in turn, changes the substance and status of the house and home she enters into or continues to live in simply by her existence as well as by her daily transactions with others. Thus, each and every home of the divorced or separated woman is somehow contradictory to the cultural and social expectations regarding those homes. Even if the woman returns to her natal home or carries on living in her affinal home, these houses and homes are not the same or conventional any more. This creates kinship tensions both within and outside of the houses – exploring them will be the second object of this part (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). As Carsten (2004, 35) states, kinship is *made* in houses through the intimate sharing of space, food and nurturance that goes on a within domestic place. Accordingly, kinship is also questioned in relation to home and houses. As the marital breakdown makes all "kinship ideals" (see Trawick 1996, 185-186) unreachable, the divorced and separated women, as well as their families, are made to seek alternative, yet, suitable, acceptable and proper means by which to construct their personhood through kinship and to act out their kinship. The homes and houses of divorced and separated women – like homes and houses in India – are constituted of "flows" of people within them. However, in each kind of house some relationships, some bonds and, consequently, some kinship tensions become more crucial pronounced than others due to the actual living situation and they illuminate the kinship systems from different angles.

Thirdly, earlier I have presented that, as "relational persons", the divorced and separated women's "individual agency" is often directed to-

wards others (Chapters 4 and 5). Like other South Indian people, they act as the agents of groups or, as I suggested, the agents of their homes within which they feel they belong or that they want to belong to. Similarly, their sense of responsibility implies not only the sense of control over decisions affecting one's life but also the responsibility the person assumes and seeks to have for others (see Mines 1994, 182). By examining these factors together – homemaking, kinship tensions, agency and responsibility towards others – I will show whether they also lead to intended as well as unintended consequences and challenges to the existing social order of gender and kinship hierarchies. Finally, I will look at how all of this valorises the divorced and separated women's self-representations and self-constructions as relational persons and the concept of personhood in South India. I will seek to answer the question: How are the concepts of home and the concepts of person linked in India – as the home is often interpreted as a symbol of person?

This chapter, 6, explores the houses of one third of the women (15*)* who were living with their parents and siblings, usually in their natal home, sometimes also with a child (5) and looks at the bonds and tensions between siblings of different generations (tensions of natal kin). The fluidity of homes and changing residences (see earlier) became evident during my fieldwork. The women's living situations kept on changing over the years or during my fieldwork year: nearly all the women whom I had met during both of my fieldwork years (1996 and 2000) had either moved into a different kind of living situation or had at least moved into a new residence (see table 6.1). I focus on the women's living situations during my fieldwork in 2000 or/and 1996 (see table 6.2; see also appendix 1).[172]

[172] Three women (Madhu, Manika and Rathamma) are analysed in two different living situations in 1996 and in 2000 therefore N is 53.

Table 6.1: A comparison of living situations of 8 of the divorced and separated women in 1996 and 2000.

	1996	2000
Sulabha	Living alone (rent paid by a boyfriend)	Initially living alone, during the year moved in with a boyfriend into another residence (owned by the boyfriend)
Kalpana	Living with mother, father, elder brother, two younger sisters	Living with mother (father expired), elder brother, two younger sisters in another residence, during the year they moved into a new house bought by the brother
Madhu	Living alone	Living with father, first, in another rented house, then in a new house constructed and owned by Madhu and father
Nirmala	Living alone (with her working place)	Living with a younger sister (unmarried, above 40) in another residence and in another town
Manika	Living with mother and younger sister	Initially living with a room mate in another residence, later alone in a new residence
Rathamma	Living alone	Living with her son (major)
Latha	Living alone	Living with her children
Sarasa	Living alone	Living with her children

Table 6.2: The number of divorced and separated women, based on their living situations, during my fieldwork 2000 and/or 1996. (Three women are analysed in two different living situations therefore N is 53).

Women living with their parents and potential siblings (5 of these women had their own child/children along with them)	15
Women living with their brother (one woman with children)	3
Women living with their children	18
Women living alone	16
Women living with their ex-husband	1
Total	53

Homemaking by Taking on Family Duties

Renewing Social Circles at Weddings

Veena[173] and her younger sister, Sarasvati, are busy preparing themselves for the evening's marriage reception when I enter their house, situated in a traditional, middle class part of Bangalore. Usually it is I who sits in that hall and waits for Veena as she always has some "*urgent work*" to do*:* she has her son, Mahes, to accompany to and from the school or swimming school, shopping to do, things to arrange, people to meet and help, not to mention the regular court visits related to her ongoing divorce process. In contrast, Sarasvati, the younger sister, is always at home. She brings me something to eat and drink and keeps me company unless she is too busy cooking in the kitchen – which is her "work" and responsibility in the house. Sometimes I meet Veena's father, often accompanied by his friends who are all retired. Veena's mother is seriously ill and is therefore always – but never alone – at home. Veena takes care of her: makes her coffee and breakfast, feeds her, gives her medicine or whatever she needs. *"My sister and brother do not have enough patience with her, so they quarrel with her,"* she explains to me. Once, when Veena's dropping off breakfast to her son's school took longer than she thought, she criticized her sister and brother for not giving breakfast to their mother. Sharply they relied: *"It is <u>your</u> work."* What actually was, in turn, the brother's work, was never revealed to me. *"He <u>says</u> that he gives computer lectures but I do not interfere in his business, not any more*," Veena commented once.

As usually, people come and go in Veena's house – a relative who is on her way to attend the same marriage reception as Veena drops in for a while, someone who wants to make a phone call from the telephone booth run by the family peeps in, and a young woman, who is a daughter of Veena's good friend and a neighbour of Veena's paternal aunt, enters the house and begins to routinely dress Veena's son, Mahes, for the marriage. Mahes' toys are scattered around the floor together with a few big sacks of grain. Dressed in white salwar kameez, Veena is combing Sarasvati's hair. Sarasvati is wearing bright gold jewellery and a valuable looking green silk sari which was once bought for 15 000rs for Veena's son's name-giving ceremony. Sarasvati should look appealing as they are intently searching for a groom for her and marriages are good places to

[173] H, 33, u, d, 1c.

meet people. Veena and her ex-husband's huge marriage photo is staring down at me from a showcase, together with Veena's parents' marriage photo. Although Veena's marriage failed, she sees no reason to hide her marriage photo. On the contrary, for her it represents her parents' efforts to arrange her marriage, her status as a once (or still?) married woman and her innocence as a *"deserted"* wife. *"Even if your mother dies, you would not remove her photo, would you?"* she reasons.

Veena considers participating in marriages as the best way to learn about *"Indian culture"* and its *"mentality"* and, as she has a *"helping nature"* she has invited me to this two-day marriage ceremony with them. There is a huge bunch of wedding invitations on the side table. Last week they – Veena, Sarasvati and the father – participated in numerous weddings. On one single day they went to six weddings. However, they succeed in visiting each of them, at least, for a short while. *"Otherwise they may think bad of us. People take photos of and video wedding ceremony, so even afterwards they can see who came and what they were wearing,"* Sarasvati explained to me when we were sitting in the marriage reception and waiting for Veena, who had earlier introduced us to our host, the groom's father, but had then immediately left again as she had *"important work"* to do. Approximately 6000 of their *"community people",* mostly belonging to Gowda-caste of Hindus, are visiting this grand marriage. Sarasvati has taken care of Mahes while we have chatted with people and sampled the luxurious buffet dinner. Finally Veena, now dressed up in a silk sari, arrives with a wedding present and calms Sarasvati with a *"everything is fine.* It is already late, so Sarasvati, Mahes and the father go back home. Usually only relatives and the closest friends – approximately a hundred women and fifty men in this marriage – stay this late, however, Veena wants me to see the important rituals performed by women during the night. Nobody questions our attendance, on the contrary, it is warmly appreciated. Veena is *"socialising with everyone"*: all the time she talks to different people but with the same smile and friendly gestures. With ease, she is getting acquainted to the women of the bride's side whom she did not know well earlier.

We are invited to the back stage, into the bride's room, where the bride is changing her clothes, taking a breath, and preparing herself for the next step of the ceremony with her close family members. When the women's *"haldi ceremony"* starts we are sitting among this close circle of relatives. In the ritual, the women colour with haldi, i.e. yellow turmeric

powder, the faces of the groom, his parents, the bride and her parents. At the same time, they receive gifts, such as saris and clothes; and congratulations. Veena points out to me a woman who sits far from the others, wearing no jewellery nor *kumkum*, and whispers: *"She is a widow. Neither widows nor unmarried women should take part in these auspicious rituals."* Veena always takes part in these rituals, likewise, she always puts *kumkum,* bindi, onto her forehead by touching her *tali*, the sign of a married woman, whenever it is offered. No-one questions it. Yet, according to her, approximately half of the people at this wedding know about her marital breakdown. The rest think that her husband could not come tonight but even they will come to know the truth later. *"You just cannot hide such a thing from your relatives."* According to Veena, some pity her, others feel bad for her, but those people who came to *"ask questions"* can be counted on the fingers of one hand, as *"people like us, and people like me because I am not selfish at all."* Nevertheless, because of their wide social circle, the whole issue is harder for Veena than for any *"neighbour girls who sit home all days."* At three o'clock at night, the haldi-ceremony is finally over and a family friend drops us home and I climb up the stairs to the second floor of their house, which is still under renovation but where someone has made a bed for me – there are three hours left in which to sleep.

Early the next morning, Veena is again doing Sarasvati's hair and the same young woman is helping Mahes to dress up. The sisters are wearing bright silk saris, gold jewellery and they look even more festive than they did the day before. Veena is taking me and Mahes on her scooter back to the marriage hall which is already full of life, with guests, musicians, priests, kitchen staff, cameramen etc. The air is filled with the smell of flowers and burning incense sticks, and the sound of horns blowing, drums banging and people talking. We eat a quick breakfast. The main marriage ritual, i.e. the tying of *tali,* happens between 9.30 and 10.30, during the auspicious time of *muhurtham*. After we also take part in the blessing and congratulations ceremony where one places a coin in a coconut held by the married couple, pours milk on it and throws rice three times over the heads of the couple. While following the rituals, Veena and Sarasvati are having conversations with numerous people. *"Can you imagine that all these people spend their precious time, take leave from their jobs and travel from afar, to perform the rituals, to bless the couple and wish them good luck, and to show respect for the family,"* just like yesterday, Veena repeats this again and again during the rituals. When I also marvel

at the efforts of the bride's family, both time and money wise – someone estimated that the total cost of the marriage would be around 20 lakhs, i.e. 2 million rupees – Veena agrees but still place greater emphasises on the efforts of the guests. Before the final ritual, where the married couple greets the sun and moon, we rush again to the banquet hall for a lunch and then to thank our host and to receive gifts, steel kitchen pots. Yesterday we received gifts of coconuts.

Finally, when we are back at Veena's house, Sarasvati is following her mother in taking an afternoon nap but Veena and her father are still full of energy. Again, there will be a new wedding this evening. *"You come with us and bring your husband along,"* the father insists but I firmly refuse – I can hardly keep my eyes open. "Aren't you tired at all?" I ask Veena. *"Oh yes, I am. My cheeks are hurting after all that smiling and talking to everyone."* However, they certainly will go to the wedding in the evening – one potential groom for Sarasvati will go there and, anyway, it is their duty and pride to go to wish the couple well and to show respect to their family. When I am leaving, I witness how *"someone they know"* steps in the house. He needs to rent a flat and as Veena's family know many people, he wonders if they could help him. Veena takes her phone book and starts to make phone calls. Later I heard that she found him a place to rent, through her contacts of course.

For Veena, marriages represent the hospitality of Indian people, their generosity, reciprocity, humanity and, also, something of the value of *"them"* to show and teach a visitor about. Even Veena's own marital failure did not diminish the glory she feels for the marriages themselves. On the contrary, Veena still respected the efforts her father, family, relatives and all the guests made for her wedding despite the fact that *"that chap spoilt everything".* In fact, the huge bunch of wedding invitations as well as the constant flow of people in their house were clear proof of the family's good name that even Veena's marital breakdown had not ruined. For Veena, taking part in weddings, rituals and marital transactions in the forms of gifts, eating and socializing with others was as a question of family honour. Moreover, it was a means to ensure the continuity of reciprocity within their community and a means to enlarge the social circle with right kind of people. This social circle was the most valuable resource of the family, particularly now, when they were searching for a groom for Veena's sister, Sarasvati. They hoped and acted in order to fulfil the next step of reciprocity – finding a groom and then inviting

everyone to the marriage organized by themselves. As presented above, Veena had taken upon herself the main role in these marital transactions as a representative of her family and house; it was her responsibility. She was managing time and relationships not only effectively but also sensitively. At the same time her actions served another purpose, she was acting in order to improve and strengthen her own position within her family and within her community. She helped others and counted on their reciprocity. Moreover, as a person believed to be connected substantially with other people, places and things of their lived-in-worlds in India (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriott 1990), by means of substantial transactions at the weddings such as eating together, touching, exchanging words, taking parting in the same rituals, people, such as Veena, are thought to absorb, give out and take in a part of themselves. Thus, such transactions with the right kinds of people would have a positive influence on a person's substantial self-construction. Similarly, Veena who wanted to present and consider herself as a married yet deserted *wife* took part in rituals and in the ritual transactions of auspicious married women, which, for example, other divorced women may consider to be problematic (see later, in Chapter 6). Moreover, Veena kept her marriage photo in sight and *tali* around her neck. Thus, by acting according to her own idea of justice, she was manoeuvring her status and position through interaction and transactions at the weddings while she was also there representing her family and her house.

In the following sections, I will observe the homes and houses of Veena and other divorced or separated women (15 out of 53) who returned to again live together with their parents again – and potential siblings and children (see appendix 1 for details of the women). Like Veena, other nine of these women[174] were living in the same parental house that they had once left for the marriage and one woman[175] was living in a new housing provided by the parents. These women were usually in their thirties, they had lived for only a relatively short time with they husbands and three of them had had a child. Four other women[176] were living

[174] Shanti Devi (H, 25, u, d/j, 0c), Jyothi (H, 26, m, d/j, 1c), Leela (H, 25, u, d/j, 0c), Elisabeth (C, 42, m, s/u, 0c), Aisa (M, 26, m, d/c, 1c), Neera (H,~30, m, d/j, 0c), Kiran (H, 24, u, d/j-, 0c), Shabana (H, 31, u, d/j-, 1c), Sushilamma (H, ~30, m, s/u, 3c).

[175] Kalpana (H, 29, m, d/j, 0c /1996 + H, 33, m, d/j, 0c /2000).

[176] Safia (M, 35, m, d/c, 0c), Manjula, (H, 43, m, d/j, 2c), Madhu (H, 42, m, d/j, 0c /2000), Manika (H, 27, m, s/u, 0c /1996).

in new houses provided for either fully or partly by themselves. These women had a longer marital history, more children or they had already been separated or divorced for a longer period of time. In addition, three of the women were living with their brothers. These women were middle class women; a few of them upper or lower middle class women. Most of these women had paid jobs.

When the divorced or separated women started to live again together with their parents and potential siblings and children, this confused all the positions and responsibilities of their homes and houses. In every case, the status of divorced or separated women affected the status of the house they were living in and the substance of the house changed: it was not conventional anymore. Moreover, as Amato (1994, 213) notes in his study on the impact of divorce, women generally live with their parents and/or siblings for a period of time following marital disruption but it is also common for tension to arise. The divorced daughter's presence in the household burdens the family economically, lowers the status of the entire family and compromises the marriage chances of any remaining daughters (ibid.). In the following section I will look at how the divorced and separated women dealt with this potential status deprivation they caused to their natal home. Above I have described how Veena represented her house at the weddings. Next I will look at how Veena's and other divorced and separated women's agency and responsibility were acted out through their ways of homemaking, how they were re-creating their positions both within and outside of their houses, and, how they were retaining their sense of self-worth while – intentionally or unintentionally – manoeuvring social order based on gender and kinship hierarchies as well as reconstructing their ideas of dharma and justice. I will seek to answer the question: How their relational personhood and self-representations were re-constructed through familial sharing and homemaking as well as through contradictions and tensions embedded in them?

Household Responsibilities

Veena's main strategy in order to rebuild herself a strong and respected position not only within her home but also in her neighbourhood, community and among friends and relatives was to *"help"* others. She explained helping as an outcome of her *"nature"* and upbringing. At home, she fulfilled her main responsibilities of taking care of her seriously ill mother and of course her own son, Mahes, promptly and heartily. Out-

side the home, Veena helped others with her advice, empathy, contacts and skills. In fact, most of the divorced and separated women who were living with their parents and siblings, began to take more responsibility for the house and the family. If one family member e.g., an elderly mother or father or disabled sister or brother needed special care, the women took her/his into their personal care and responsibility. The women's mothers were particularly the objects of their loving attention.

Some women such as Veena were also building networks of reciprocal help with their relatives and friends. One woman, Madhu[177], became the adviser to those of her relatives who were having "unconventional" family problems, i.e. the loneliness of an unmarried cousin or the mental problems of the father of another cousin. She was approached when more traditional sources of support, such as the father or father's brother, had refused the seekers of help. Another woman, Shanti Devi[178], became a well-respected expert in marriage arrangements for her cousins. She knew what they had to take into consideration in order to avoid repeating her *"mistake"*. Friends' and relatives' requests for help and the women's ability to respond to them, strengthened the women's position in the eyes of their community and within their houses. Furthermore, it brought a good name, reputation and the potential for reciprocal help to their houses and their members.

In Veena's house cooking was the main responsibility and also the necessary training of Veena's sister, heading for to her future marriage. However, the sister herself commented that it is Veena who can prepare non-vegetarian food, who always succeeded with her cookings and who makes the best *citrana*, lemon rice, in their family. Veena also cooked for special occasions, i.e. festival days, prepared her mother's and son's breakfasts and snacks between the main dishes and served coffee or tea for her father's friends or others who dropped in if she was at home.

Unlike Veena, some divorced and separated women wanted to stay indoors in order to avoid other people's questions and remarks concerning their marital break up. Their practices of homemaking concentrated on household work. Most of the women had already developed into experienced house keepers. Particularly, those women who did not have a paid job took a lot of responsibility for the housework, i.e. cooking and cleaning, together with their mothers and unmarried sisters. Fur-

[177] H, 38, m, s/u, 0c /1996 + H, 42, m, d/j, 0c /2000.
[178] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.

thermore, most of the women with paid jobs used their weekly leave for cooking, cleaning or washing clothes, thus, giving their mothers some time to relax. The women did not regret their lack of personal time, some watched a bit of television and that was enough.

There were only a couple of women who, after their short marriage, returned to be back under their mother's total care or supervision. One woman, Leela[179] *"took full advantage"* of the care of her parents and concentrated on her demanding job and further studies with the intention of advancing her working career. The parents of another woman, Aisa'[180], wished for her to marry her off again and therefore she was now learning to cook and to do other housework under her mother's firm control in order to avoid the old mistakes. In both cases, the women's mothers were relatively young, in good heath and both the protective and dominating figures of their families.

According to Veena, she and her sister made *pujas* and lit the lamp in the puja-room in their family. However, the room usually seemed to be dark as they were busy with their other work or there were other things such as painting going on in the house. Other divorced and separated women also prayed for the family and performed the religious rituals of the house on festival days which are considered by Hindus to be the important tasks of women in the house (e.g. Wadley 1995, 125-127; Hancock 1999, 17; Leslie 1992, 6-8) and an important part of the activity of homemaking. The women also preserved the religious pictures or statues bought from their pilgrimages or visits to famous temples or other religious places and any small gifts received from friends or relatives and their own children's photos and toys in their showcases.

During my fieldwork, Veena's mother passed away. Veena became the eldest woman of the house to whom the other family members now relied on even more than earlier. Similarly, other divorced and separated women's positions – particularly those of an experienced elder sister – developed further into the care taker of the whole family if the death or serious ill of the mother or father occurred in the house. Sometimes the women faced the problematic situation of too many duties and expectations being directed at them by both their younger sisters and brothers as well as by their widowed mother or father. They took care of the living parent – the mother financially or the father by household work – and, to their siblings, they acted

[179] H, 25, u, d/j, 0c.
[180] M, 26, m, d/c, 1c.

as a lost mother by nurturing and reprimanding them or as a lost father by taking care of their education, marriage arrangements, finances and by advising them; or at least some of these things. Some women even gained such authority in relation to their still-living parents. Safia[181], for example, succeeded in making her alcoholic father stop drinking and gained a lot of respect in her family. Although the father was still incapable of working and maintaining the family, he, at least, gave up his destructive behaviour against the family members. Moreover, some women became the substitute head of the family even to the family visitors seeking advice or guidance. However, sometimes these women found their situation too stressful, particularly, if the others took it for granted and complained instead of acting in *"co-operation"*.

Material Investments

Veena made investments and purchased valuables, jewellery and gifts which the family members needed for themselves or to give as gifts. At that time, Veena's father was extending their house by building a new floor which included two separate apartments. Veena helped him by selecting and buying materials and later by selecting tenants to live there. She was much-appreciated for her business skills and those skills were often in use as the family also had always some side businesses: presently a telephone booth and dairy activities, previously a textile business, and in future paying guest accommodation in the extra apartments which Veena wanted me to advertise in Finland for researchers working in India and for other potential "paying guests" heading to India. Nevertheless, she did not invest her own money in the family business or house keeping although she had more-or-less regular earnings. The father took care of everything and Veena used her money for her "own" investments and purchases for the benefit of her and her son, e.g. a scooter and a driving licence to fetch the son to school or carefully selected toys and chocolate. When Veena received an alimony payment of 3 lakhs, she invested the sum in a site in order to increase its value and to be used for buying a house of her own in the future.

As with Veena's father, the fathers of other divorced or separated women did not expect any money from their daughters if they managed well enough to maintain the family. On the contrary, the fathers preferred

[181] M, 35, m, d/c, 0c.

that the daughters would save for themselves because they were worried about their daughters' uncertain futures. Thus, the women who got alimony or *mehr* or earned a salary invested or saved at least part of it for their own future in order to *not* then be a burden on their parents. However, particularly, if the family was having financial problems, the women considered helping and to maintaining the household and its member as their important duty because their parents had also other children to care for and to marry off. *"I want to share the burden of my marriage and we have to arrange my sister's marriage… I want to be like a son to my father,"* Shanti Devi[182] explained. Moreover, by giving a regular share of their salary to the parents, the women justified their going to work even if they used a part of their salaries for personal things. Sometimes siblings together replaced the missing or sick or dead father. One woman, Kalpana[183], made, together with her elder brother and younger sisters, a list of the goods – furniture or household appliances – that their house would need most. They all earned and saved together and bought them one by one.

On the other hand, Safia[184], who was employed by a women's organisation, carries alone not only the main responsibility of caring for the livelihood, rent and welfare of her father, mother, sister and brother living together with her but also for the financing of her other sisters' marriages and the guaranteeing of her other brother's business loans. Moreover, her "*heart melts"* whenever her relatives ask for small but necessary loans. She acts like the head of family, however, she feels that it is beyond her earning capacity and cause her serious worries and depression. Similarly, another woman, Manjula[185], now a head constable, is the sole supporter and promoter of her originally poor, scheduled caste family. For two decades she has taken care of the housing and livelihood of her widow mother, two younger sisters, one younger brother and her two own sons. She encourages her siblings and sons to study, has taken on the main financial responsibility for their education and training and has helped them to find good working posts with her relations in the police. Furthermore, she has arranged her sisters' as well as her son's marriages and paid the marriage expenses. Consequently, she feels respected by her family members. However, although she wants to treat everyone equally,

[182] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.
[183] H, 29, m, d/j, 0c /1996.
[184] M, 35, m, d/c, 0c.
[185] H, 43, m, d/j, 2c.

she has not been able to help feelings of competition and jealousy breaking her family's unity, which has caused her further worries and anxiety (see later, in Chapter 6).

To summarise, by the above-described activities of homemaking, the divorced and separated women constructed their "third home"– their sense of belonging, their sense of feeling home in their re-constructed natal homes through the interaction with other family members. As described above, most of the women were extremely busy with their homemaking activities. They directed their agency in order to bear the responsibility for the natal home and its members. Thanks to their life experiences of their surviving the crisis of a marital break up, they had also become capable of carrying on various duties both inside and outside of the house – to fulfil as well as to increase others' expectations. I submit that by doing "more" than their, for example, earlier share of the work the women sought to compensate for the status deprivation they brought to their houses. Moreover, by taking on household responsibilities women made or sought to make themselves indispensable members of the house – they were not only temporary refugees anymore. By the same token, the women were also remaking their places at home and building themselves better positions and, even, manoeuvring the social order based on prevailing gender and family hierarchies which, for example, subordinate women to men and the younger to the elder. They were manoeuvring and challenging culturally and socially-motivated and -shaped expectations and responsibilities concerning the male roles of son and brother. The women acted as a son to parents (a help in old age, a financial supporter of a family), as a brother to a sister (a supporter during problems in her marriage, an arranger of marriages), as a father to a daughter (an adviser, an arranger of marriages, a financial supporter), and as a father to a family (a substitute for a deceased father; a head of the family). Additionally, the women acted as a mother of their mother's or mother-in-law's generation to a natal family (a substitute for a deceased mother; the main one responsible for household chores), thus they made use of social and cultural valuation and authority of a senior woman whose children are married (e.g. Säävälä 2006, 160; Tiengtrakul 2006, 28).

By acting out these re-shaped family role positions, the women constructed their self-representations of dutiful, respectful persons and caretakers of family and improved their family position – authority goes with responsibility, thus, by taking on more family responsibilities, the

women obtained more prestige within their house and family. From their renewed family positions, the women engaged themselves in substantial transactions of home sharing and interaction that could contribute positively to the substance of their relational personhood, if we apply the idea that the persons are connected substantially and influence each other by giving out and taking in parts of themselves (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriott 1990). Moreover, by acting through their reshaped family roles the women challenged the contemporary family system by becoming the head of the family or an adviser regarding unconventional family problems among relatives. Similarly, they questioned the contemporary gender system. One woman, Manika[186], who has two elder brothers, put in plain words:

> Imagine, society is hesitant to have a baby girl, but even my mother is happy that we (she and her unmarried sister) girls are helping her in her old age. We too are happy that we can be of some help... The only thing a girl demands is education. The only thing she requires is encouragement and education. She should have the freedom to do anything. And we are in no way less than boys. We can do anything better than they can.

Furthermore, the women who returned to their natal homes did not only make decisions concerning family issues or house but also, and most of all, decisions about their own lives: about studies, employment, expenditure, leisure, potential second marriages, their children's futures. Also in this way they challenged the gendered expectation of the man as a controller of a woman and her power.[187] Through these ideas and reshaped family positions the women, in fact, made their reconstructed parental homes challenging places.

Nevertheless, although the women's acts challenged – or may challenge – gender and kinship hierarchies, their expectations and feelings; and also disappointments; often followed their kinships' logic and long-

[186] H, 27, m, s/u, 0c /1996.

[187] See Wadley's (1977, 114, 115) discussion of the control of womanhood in Hindu culture which is based on the male-dominated classical literature. According to Wadley, the concept of female in Hinduism presents important duality: on the one hand the woman is fertile, benevolent, the bestower, on the other, she is aggressive, malevolent, the destroyer. Due to the duel nature of the Hindu female, a central theme of norms and guidelines for proper female behaviour, is that men must control women and their power (ibid. 119). There are similar beliefs in Islam in India (see e.g. Jeffery 1979, 20, 76; Moore 1998, 32-33, 174.) Although, the control of womanhood highlights the control of female sexuality, its consequences spread also to other areas of social life and of female participation in them.

ings. As Trawick (1996, 152) points out, kinship creates longings that can never be fulfilled. Trawick (1996, 185-186) explores desires and tensions embedded in the Dravidian kinship system. According to her, if the highly patterned, symmetrical and indeed aesthetically satisfying verbal system of Dravidian kinship terminology reflected precisely the organisation of human beings at grass-roots level, all the tensions – between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands – would be resolved and all the desires would to be fulfilled; perhaps, the expectations of harmony would be reinforced by the aesthetic symmetry of the terminology system. However, in real life this terminological system could never be acted out perfectly, instead, some people's fulfilled dreams completely baffle others and the unfulfillment of dreams leads to a sense of injustice. According to Trawick (ibid., 186), people with their various longings support the continuation of the kinship ideal but the process of investing their different personal dreams in it makes the possibility of each other's total fulfilment all the more remote. Marital breakdown makes all "ideals" unreachable. Instead of them, the divorces and separated women as well as their families are forced to seek an alternative, yet, suitable, acceptable and proper ways to construct and act out their kinship and to search for the harmony envisaged and "hinted at" by the ideal of the complementary kinship system.

In fact, it was inevitable that the women's marital breakdown and the confusion of family positions would create conflicts within the family as well as among the kin. Next, I will examine the conflicts and tensions and their resolutions. In the case of the divorced and separated women who returned to again live with their parents and siblings the main kinship tensions resulting from marital breakdown led to conflicting expectations between the siblings, and to a collision of interests between siblings and one's own children over generations.

Testing Family Loyalties

Conflicting Interdependence with Aunts and Uncles

Some divorced and separated women's aunts and uncles and, particularly their spouses, expressed their anger at the woman's returning back to her natal home. When they heard about it, they rushed into the house with accusations and demanded that the woman should return to her husband

no matter what the cost. They did not necessarily even know about the real problems of the marriage. Instead they might have heard rumours as it was impossible to keep the break up secret from them. Usually they expressed deep concern about the name of the family and the reputation of the community. This was particularly a problem for those who had their own daughters to marry off. However, divorced women as well as their parents felt that it was insulting that others were more worried about the family's reputation than about them, the only "true" victims of the tragedy.

Some women's aunts had acted as mediators when arranging the marriage by recommending their *own* affinal relatives to the women. Due to this practical reason, they felt that the break-up of the marriage had insulted their personal honour, particularly in the eyes of *their* affinal family. In turn, the woman and her parents felt that the mediating aunt had deeply betrayed them. "*My mother believed her own sister,"* one woman sighed in disappointment. On the other hand, the marital breakdown insulted the honour of the potential, i.e. the terminological, close-kin affinal relatives for structural reasons. In both cases, the consequences of martial breakdown spread widely along kinship lines into multiple directions, causing a variety of tensions. Tensions and conflicts are commonplace among any kin, the marital breakdown served as a reason for them to surface.

Many divorced and separated women did not have any open conflict with their aunts and uncles, but they nevertheless considered their (consanguineal) relatives to be *"a burden"*.[188] Furthermore, a few women had cut their connections with their relatives by entering into a love marriage, as opposed to an arranged marriage, the subsequent break up of the marriage did not improve the situation. Nearly every woman mentioned that their relatives gossiped. *"Relatives always insult one another. I do not trust my relatives. I trust my family, my parents and sisters and my brother,"* Su-

[188] According to Devi's (1998, 76) study, nearly half of the divorced women (47.3 %) were persuaded by their families and relatives not to opt for divorce by argument that such an act would bring shame to the whole family especially as it was unheard of in the family till then. Also, according to Krishnakumari's (1987, 139-140) research, more than half of the divorced women in Bangalore considered that their relatives (other than parents and siblings) treated them indifferently. In Pothen's (1987, 195-196) research of 200 cases, the attitude of the family towards divorced women was sympathetic, but attitude was measured by only one question that did not distinguish the natal family from the remaining kin.

labha's[189] distinguished between the overall family – *"relatives"* – and the natal family. Similarly, many women preferred to ask for help from the members of their natal family or friends. Some isolated themselves from the relatives by never visiting them or attending their marriages – at least for a while whereas others selected relatives they considered to worthy of trust: some women praised how their father's brothers (*doDDappa, cikkappa,* trans. big/little father) never let them down and other women considered their mother's elder sister (*doDDamma,* trans. big mother) to be more like mother to them. Some women considered their parallel cousins as real, "ideal" sisters and brothers to them.

In the conflict situation, the divorced and separated women's parents usually took their daughter's side, even against their own sisters and brothers or the whole community. One father recalled how his brother's wife had asked him how he could allow the daughter to *"come out"* and return to her natal home. He had answered them, "*How can I knowingly let my daughter suffer with a husband who is not mentally well. If I know that my daughter is suffering, how can I let it continue?"* Thus, the preference was given to their own child – their own daughter – and to her wellbeing. Accordingly, the concern that some parents' sisters and brothers voiced about the "name of the family" could in fact be their concern for their own child's – daughter's – marriage chances. Thus, they themselves also preferred the well being of their own child/daughter even at the expense of their sister or brother and her/his child/daughter. The preference given to one's own children became further illuminated by the consequences of close-kin marriages after a marital break up. One woman ended up losing contact with her grand mother and grand father (i.e. her mother's mother and mother's father) who gave preference to their son, i.e. the woman's ex-husband (her mother's younger brother) and another woman lost contact with her aunty and uncle (her father's sister and sister's husband) who also gave preference to their son, i.e. the woman's ex-husband (her father's sister's son). In both cases, the other brothers of the mother in the first case; and the other sister and brothers of the father in the second case, ended all contact with the woman and her family. Thus, cross-cousin or uncle-niece marriages can lead to a marital breakdown being an even more socially severe situation for the woman at the heart of the breakdown.

[189] H, 31, u, s/u, 1c /1996.

Nevertheless, the ritual and ceremonial reciprocity and mutual dependency made it a necessity to tolerate aunts and uncles as well as other (consanguineal) relatives, if at all possible.[190] Usually actual as well as threatened conflicts calmed down when time passed and all adjusted to the situation. Due to the irreplaceable ritual roles as well as potential affinal unions of the future, relatives were to forgive each others and to renew their relationships after the conflicts. For example, Kalpana's[191] mother's younger brother and his wife (i.e. the terminological, close-kin affinal relatives par excellence[192]) were the most vehement and vociferous accusers regarding Kalpana's return. Nevertheless, some months later the brother's wife entered their house with a totally different tone of voice: their daughter had attend puberty and Kalpana, her parents, sisters and brother were all warmly welcomed to attain her puberty ceremony (see Chapter 2 about the ceremony). Reluctantly, they went. Moreover, they brought expensive gifts, which they could hardly afford, as Kalpana's brother had a ritually important role as a gift-giver because he was the son of celebrated girl's father's elder sister, and so a potential close-kin marriage partner for the girl. Other divorced and separated women also emphasized the importance of fulfilling their ritual responsibilities and other formal kinship duties.

Correspondingly, if the divorced women's family wanted to arrange a marriage or any other ceremony or function, aunts and uncles with their families were to be there as their presence was essential: *"they "make" the functions"*, and thus, *"whether you like your relatives or not, you must invite them",* as one of the women put it. Similarly, many women took part in weddings and other family-related functions with their parents and siblings. In fact, none of the women told of being refused an invitation to either weddings or the rituals performed by the married women as a result of their ambiguous status as divorced or separated woman as, for example, the higher caste widows who may not be welcomed to participate in weddings

[190] Also Säävälä (2005) notes that outright conflict between relatives of new middle class in Hyderabad of South India (most commonly over money, inheritance and marriage) could lead to a temporary break-up and avoidance as well, but such a schism tend to be reconciled sooner or later in a convenient situation.

[191] H, 29, m, d/j, 0c /1996.

[192] In most of the Dravidian kinship terminological systems, a single term (e.g. in Kannada, *maava*) denotes mother's brother, father's sister's husband and father-in-law; likewise a single term (in Kannada, *atte*) denotes father's sister, mother's brother's wife, and mother-in-law, etc. (e.g. see Trawick 1996, 119), note also a potential uncle-niece marriage between a woman and her mother's younger brother.

or ritual functions pertaining to fertility had (e.g. Mandelbaum 1987, 189; Dhruvarajan 1989, 91; Harlan & Courtright 1995, 13; Madan 1997: 291-292). Some women, like Veena, considered it absolutely no problem to take part in all the rituals performed by or directed to married women – in fact, it was seen as their prestigious duty to partake although some other women were more hesitant. They did not feel it was *"right"* – they were afraid that their misfortune would spread or they were not sure about what relatives or friends really thought of it *"in their hearts."* Thus, some preferred taking part in marriage expenses as no one would object that instead of rituals. Nevertheless, a more common reason to avoid marriages or other family functions was the women's hesitance to meet all the relatives and to have to answer their potential questions, particularly soon after the marital breakdown, when they felt especially vulnerable.

Furthermore, if the (consanguineal) relatives asked for help, the women usually helped, even if some bitterly remembered the occasions they themselves had not received help, usually, for their financial problems. As a matter of fact, when the economic situation of these houses and households stabilized and improved after such crises, bigger circle of (consanguineal) relatives also returned to them with their invitations and visits, leading to increased but not necessarily equivalent, reciprocity. For example, Safia[193], living with her parents and siblings, worked hard and gradually improved the financial situation of their house. This earlier abandoned re-constructed home of five brothers then became appealing to the relatives, particularly among Safia's mother's sisters and brothers, who were searching for grooms for their daughters for potential close-kin marriage.[194] Moreover, Safia granted her relatives small but essential loans (see earlier).

On the other hand, when the expectations between siblings of the women's parents generation did not fail and the interests did not clash there was nothing to report on. The women, like Veena, experienced help among (consanguineal) relatives fair and mutual, the relatives were considered important. At least, they *knew* the women and their family,

[193] M, 35, m, d/c, 0c.

[194] Safia is a Sunni Muslim. According to her, in her community they can marry from mother's side but not from the father's side because father's side is *"same blood"*. Her one brother was married to her mother's brother's daughter and the second brother was married to her mother's sister's daughter. The latter marriage would be out of question by my Hindu South Indian informants. In South India a Hindu woman can marry her father's sister's son, her mother's brother's son or her mother's younger brother, i.e., her maternal uncle although there are variations in communities and castes regarding which form of bilateral cross cousin marriage are preferred or possible.

consequently, they *knew* they were good and respectable people and supported them. As a matter of fact, sometimes I felt that significance of or, at least, existence of (consanguineal) relatives was, ultimately, taking for granted. When the relatives did not meet with expectations, they were criticised and complained about whereas when they helped and accepted the woman and her family, there was nothing to account for. Or, perhaps their presence, visits and invitations were so self-evident and natural that they forgot to tell me about them because I was supposed to look for "the news" of the women's lives. In the same way, when the women described their relationship with their siblings or talked about their siblings, disappointments and failed expectations were emphasised.

The divorced or separated women trusted their parents' good will and sincerity when they were welcomed back to live in their house. However, the siblings' attitude was sometimes considered as a problem, and if not an immediate one, then as a potential in the future. Therefore some women went to work and earned for the sake of the whole family. *"When my brother and sister grow up, they should not say that I left my husband's house and come back to my place to be dependent on them,"* Shanti Devi[195] explained. Next I will describe the conflicts and tensions among the siblings that can arise, particularly, while living again under the same roof. However, I will also include those siblings living in separate houses in this discussion.

Tensions and Disappointments among Siblings

Brothers

The bond between a brother and sister is described as close, durable and affectionate and it is enacted through annual rites, rituals and gifts all over India (e.g. Mandelbaum 1987, 67-69; Raheja 1995, 32; Wadley 1995, 97). The vital significance of a woman's ties to her brother is also evident in women's songs and everyday social practices, as Raheja (1995, 33) noted in a North Indian village. The portrayal of the protective and caring brother as a typical character in popular cinema is also revealing. According to Wadley's (1995, 97) study of Hindu widows in a North Indian village, the most important ritual for unmarried girls is *bhaiya duj*, Brothers' day, when women pray for their brothers and seek the protection brothers are obliged to give throughout their lives. If a woman loses her husband's protection, symbolically and/or economically, the brother's

[195] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.

protection should replace it. The brother is also a woman's main link to her natal home and kin. As Das (1997, 219), who studied urban Punjabis in North India, points out, only a brother can protect a woman in a conflict with her husband and in-laws.

Furthermore, the South Indian institution of cross-cousin marriage has a special significance for the closeness of a brother and sister, as Trawick's (1996, 170-178) study of family life in a Tamil Nadu village illustrates. According to Trawick (1996, 172-173) the marital tie is clearly represented in both important ancient and modern stories as a continuation of the sibling tie; making it the bond of a deep longing joining brother and sister through their offspring. A belief in the reality of the blood bond, in the powerful emotional significance of having emerged from the same womb would contribute to this attachment (ibid.). The brother and sister share a womb and share a natal home (ibid. 187). Other South Indian ethnographies (e.g. Säävälä 2001; Kapadia 1996; Ram 1992; Dumont 2000, 227) also emphasize the importance of a brother sister bond through generations; indicated by cross-cousin and a uncle-niece marriages (e.g. Säävälä 2001, 107) as well as by the ceremonial and practical importance of the mother's brother, i.e. the maternal uncle (Kapadia 1996, 18, 20-26; Dumont 1983, 86-89; 2000, 246-247). Consequently, a woman is also a sister and a daughter in socially essential ways in South India (Säävälä 2001, 107).

Many divorced or separated women who had no brothers dreamt about an elder brother. However, most of those who actually had a brother were disappointed by him. The women complained that their brothers, particularly the elder brothers, had failed to fulfil their responsibilities of protecting and supporting them during and after their marital crises. The brothers had not talked sense to the husband and his family, accompanied the woman to the court or to the police station, given financial support, bought medicine for a sick woman etc., or even if they had done some of these things, the women felt that they had not done or tried hard enough. In a few cases, I felt that the women had unrealistic expectations towards their brothers and felt cheated when these expectations were not fully met despite their brother's genuine efforts and concerns.

The women complained that their brothers had replaced their duties towards their parents and sisters with their duties towards their new

families, wives and children.[196] Thus, the women were disappointed in their brothers not only *as brothers* but also *as sons.* The brothers did not take care of the whole family nor aged parents but left them to responsibility of the women. Safia[197] became frustrated at being the only committed supporter of the house. Her brothers gave only a meagre share of their salaries to their mother and the rest of it to their wives in secret. If the brothers lived in the separated house with the new conjugal families, it was easier for them to keep a distance. According to the women, some brothers said that they did so in order to protect their *"own"* family, particularly, if they had their own daughters to marry off. Furthermore, some women who had had bad experiences with their in-laws emphasized that they could not expect anything from their brothers nor interfere in their brothers marital lives – the brothers had enough to do in order to fulfil their wives, children's and in-law's expectations – and the women did not want to be an additional burden on their brothers. Poorer women particularly understood their brothers' struggle to feed their own wives and children. Thus, they preferred, for example, to ask for small loans from their neighbours, employers, mothers or closer sisters. On the other hand, if they brother did fulfil the role as the maintainer of the house, even this made some women unsure about their futures. They wanted to further their careers or save money for the future knowing that one day they might have to move out of the house when their brothers get married and bring their wives home, as in South-India, where the predominant form of family organisation is the patrilineal and partilocal joint family (e.g. Karve 1997, 67). One woman, Jyothi[198], who had only one handicapped brother, was relieved to think that her brother will most probably never marry, so she and her son could live peacefully live in the same house while taking care of the brother.

Nevertheless, some brothers also fulfilled the women's expectations of a protective, supporting brother. Kalpana's[199] elder brother not only helped her sister in all the possible ways during her marital crises but also took on the main responsibility, first, of maintaining the house and then of buying a house where they all – Kalpana, her two sisters and now widowed mother – could live peacefully as for long as they wanted. Similarly, Shanti

[196] See Srinivas (1999,143) for the same kind of situation from the brother's point of view.

[197] M, 35, m, d/c, 0c.

[198] H, 26, m, d/j, 1c.

[199] H, 29, m, d/j, 0c /1996 + H, 33, m, d/j, 0c /2000.

Devi's[200] younger brother interrupted his education and accompanied her – as her protector – onto a training course and a new career of doing medical transcriptions. Moreover, three women of this study had moved to live with their brothers and their families either temporarily or permanently. However, these women were worried about their brothers' wives attitudes towards them if they would stay there for a long period of time.

Furthermore, some women's brothers, who lived in different houses, acknowledged them on festival days by inviting them to their homes or by buying them ritual gifts. For example, Lalithamma's[201] youngest brother brought her a new sari or the money for one every *Laksmi-puja* festival day and kept regular, warm contact with her also at other times. Correspondingly, some women, particularly those who had migrated from North India, celebrated Brothers' day, a widely spread Hindu festival by inviting their brothers home, making *puja* and tying a thread around their brother's arm in order to strengthen their bond and to maintain their brothers protection (see earlier; Wadley 1995, 97).

From a younger brother, the women's expectations of support or protection were not so high – empathy, emotional support and company were often enough, at least until the brother became matured. In contrast, a couple of women treated their younger brothers protectively, as if they were like their mothers (see Dumont 2000, 227). As an elder sister, Lalithamma[202] particularly looked after her youngest brother after their mother died. Even today Lalithamma said that she has motherly feelings towards him. Similarly, Manjula[203], considered her youngest brother as one more son to her. He and Manjula's eldest son were born at the same time and Manjula used to breast feed both of them as their mother did not have enough milk because of her health problems. Since then Manjula has taken care of her younger brother together with her own sons and with her two sisters.

Nevertheless, the women's complains about both the elder as well as younger brothers'– either expressed or implied – upset the women deeply. One woman was hurt at the way that her elder brother never introduced her to his guests as he would introduce his other sister. The younger

[200] H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c.
[201] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.
[202] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.
[203] H, 43, m, d/j, 2c.

brother of another woman, Gita[204], used to openly show his disrespect for Gita whenever she visited her natal home where her parents were living together with her younger brother, his wife and children. Gita's used to leave the room whenever he started using abusive language against her. However, one day she decided that enough was enough – why it was she who always had to leave the room? When her brother next time used abusive language, she called the police to their house. Everyone, particularly the brother, was shocked by her actions as when the police actually entered their house it brought shame upon the house. The situation was eventually settled and calmed down with discussion, however, according to Gita, by her act she showed her brother that she can also react and get authorities such as the police behind her. Although the act did not improve their personal relationship, the brother stopped his open hostility. Later, Gita approached her brother's wife directly in order to improve their relationship – she emphasised her position and importance not only as her husband's sister but as their children's only aunty, as the father's sister. Thus, she saw and promoted herself as being indispensable to the brother and his wife through their children.

Sisters

The relationship between sisters, which is considered to relaxed and close, may change after the woman's marital failure. Sometimes rivalry or jealousy between the sisters bursts out or increases after the woman's marital break up. A couple of divorced and separated women, who compared their lives with their elder sisters' lives felt inferior. For example, Sheela[205] hoped to benefit from the success of her elder sister who had settled in the USA but complained, *"they [her elder sister and brother] had never been really supportive. They never think of making my life easier,"* although the sister had, in fact, paid Sheela's rent for a long time as well as her trip to USA as a visitor but not as an immigrant as Sheela had hoped. Another couple of women described their sisters as already being competitive or jealous earlier. After the women's marital failure the women felt their sisters had rejoiced over their misery. In fact, sisters disapproving attitudes motivated some women to move to live independently. They wanted to prove to their sisters that they could cope by themselves. Moreover, they

[204] H, ~35, u, d/j, 0c.
[205] C, 54, m, d/j, 1c.

wanted to distance themselves from their sisters and their problems – they had enough problems themselves.

Sometimes the ex-husbands had caused rivalry or tension between the sisters, with different kinds of consequences. For example, one poorer woman, Padma[206], had been (unofficially) married to her elder sister's husband – to the great antagonism of the sister. The husband used to live with Padma's sister and to visit Padma irregularly. Eight years ago the husband stopped his visits and since than he and Padma had not talked to each other. Instead, Padma and her sister started *"to talk to each other"* again five years ago at the funeral of their younger parallel cousin (their mother's younger sister's son) where they concluded that life itself is so too uncertain and short for hate or stay angry at each other (see also earlier discussion about ritual interdependence among siblings). Over these years, their children had nevertheless visited both of the houses without hesitation. Padma's sister's children had come to Padma's house to meet their grandmother *(ajji)* and their mother's younger sister *(cikkamma,* trans. little mother*)*, i.e. Padma, and Padma's children had kept going to her sister's house to meet their father and their mother's elder sister *(doDDamma,* trans. big mother*)*, i.e. Padma's sister. According to Padma, her children had a good relationship with their father but the father had never helped them financially, at her sister's request. Nevertheless, they all (Padma, her husband, her elder sister and her sister's son) shared the responsibility of arranging Padma's daughter's marriage (see later, Chapter 7). In the South-Indian context, the mother's elder sister often acts like a mother to their sister's child/children; and, consequently, parallel cousins are considered like "sisters" or "brothers" (e.g. Busby 1997a, 38). Thus, the rivalry over same husband did not ruin these other relationships but perhaps even gave them some structural support.

Furthermore, while still married, a few of the husbands had made sexual advances towards the wives' younger sisters and these episodes influenced the relationship between the sisters in different ways, whether or not the sisters had accepted or rejected the advances. In the one case, the sister rejected the husband and the sisters got common proof of the husband's unfaithful nature and considered divorce to be a necessity. In another case, the woman suspected that the husband had had an affair with her sister and felt humiliated and no longer wanted to be in touch with her sister, and in a third case the husband had raped his wife's

[206] H , 50, p, s/u, 5 c (1 died).

younger sister and told this younger sister's husband - who then decided to desert her. Thus both the wife and sister's lives were adversely affected because of the actions of the husband. This wife, i.e. the divorced woman of my study, had then tried her best to help her younger sister to get on with her life, seemingly spoilt by her ex-husband.

In general, the age hierarchy of sisters appeared to influence their relationships. If the divorced or separated women had elder sisters who were already married, and living separately with their husbands and families, the elder did not usually direct any serious expectations or worries towards them and vice versa. Perhaps, the women did not want to complicate their sisters' lives and nor did they want their sisters' pity. Overall, the impact of the divorce of the younger sisters on their elder sisters was not as dramatic in comparison to the impact of divorce of the elder sisters on their younger sisters.

The divorced women's relationships to their younger unmarried sisters became problematic because the failure of a woman's marriage had the greatest negative impact on the lives and fates of any unmarried sisters. Although some women's younger sisters fully supported their sisters and were relieved that they were safe again, other women commented that their younger sisters started to treat them differently, by showing their discontent. At first, the women's marital breakdown and return back to the natal home confused the "ordinary" course of events and the order of the life based on the age hierarchy among the sisters of the house. As the elder sister, the woman was used to having authority and respect in the eyes of their younger sisters. Then when marrying and leaving the house, the woman gave up her place to the next elder sister: it was then her, the next eldest sisters, time to be the centre of attention as a bride-in-waiting. However, the women's marital failure changed the situation dramatically and unexpectedly. It became the main focus of the family and she was physically back in the house again and, worse, the woman's marital breakdown threatened their younger sisters' chances of obtaining a good marriage. There can be several consequences of marital breakdown for the younger sister and family. First, divorced elder sister as such was a demerit and drawback to the status of the family. Second, some younger sisters, who had closely and emphatically observed the problems of their elder sister's marriage, became reluctant or scared to get married at all. Third, some parents lost their confidence in arranging marriages. As described earlier, due to their daughter's marital crises, some parents became

sick or depressed, one father tried to commit suicide because of his feelings of guilt. Consequently, the divorced and separated women, like Veena, tried their best to get their younger sisters happily married. They tried to compensate for the status deprivation they had brought on the house through their work and other transactions, and they tried to find a good match for their sisters. The women disappointed in their own marriage desired a better future for their sisters and the lessons learned in the woman's own marital failure were to be taken carefully into account. Even if the parents were still the main arranger of the sisters' marriages, the divorced and separated women took – or planned to take – on the role of a consultant's and mediator. The women particularly believed in face-to-face talks with their sisters' husbands-to-be. Only through it, could the women discover the future groom's *"true nature"*, make clear their expectations, and explain the woman's own position in order to avoid any future misunderstandings. Furthermore, many women were strongly against the idea of a dowry; they would never give their sister to a man or a family that requested a dowry. This principle could further complicate the marriage arrangements. A couple of women took on the full responsibility of arranging their sisters' marriages, including financially, as their father was either dead or incapable of doing it. Furthermore, some women's sisters entered into love marriages with their sister's full support. One Hindu woman helped her sister to elope and marry the Muslim man she loved whereas some other women acted as mediators, making their parents understand and approve of their sisters' plans. Usually the divorced and separated women continued to support their younger sisters even after they had married by showing tolerance and empathy, especially, if the sisters were having marital problems. If the women's younger sisters remained unmarried which, in fact, also happened in some cases, the elder sister felt guilty about it.

Own Children and Confounded Reciprocity

Five women of the study were living in their natal homes with their children. The well-being of their own children was their responsibility and their main concern: the children were given all the attention, time and money that they were able to provide. Furthermore, the women expected their own sisters and brothers to also take care of the children but were sometimes disappointed. For example, Veena said that, as the elder sister she had looked after her sister and brother while they were young, likewise, she wrongly assumed that they would now take care of her son but

felt let down and did not expect anything from them anymore. However, I observed that Veena's sister looked after Veena's son a lot and acted much as her elder sister would do by showing a slightly teasing yet loving attitude. However, this was not enough to met Veena's expectations of reciprocity.

The tendency to give preference to one's own children over the other family members was a potential source of conflict when people of different generations were living together. Even if the woman wanted to treat her own children, siblings and parents in an equal way, jealousy or contradictions could arise, as happened within Manjula's[207] family when a representative of the fourth generation was soon to be born into their house. Manjula, a Hindu of scheduled caste, had divorced her abusive high-caste "visiting" husband 15 years ago and was now a head constable and the sole provider of their household of herself, her widowed mother, one younger brother, two sons, one daughter-in-law and, later, a baby boy, Manjula's first grandson. Manjula also had two younger sisters but they were living separately, one with her affinal family and another alone due to her divorce. The harmony within Manjula's family was soured after Manjula's elder son got married. Manjula arranged his marriage and spent money on it without asking for anything – no dowry, no expenses – from the bride's side or from anyone on Majula's side. The new daughter-in-law moved into their house to live together with Manjula and her sons, the younger brother and the mother. Soon the daughter-in-law became very attached to Manjula. According to Manjula, she treated her as she were her own child such as Manjula had always treated her younger sisters, whose marriages – as well as training and working posts – she had settled earlier and her younger brother, whose career opportunities she had promoted although he had not used those opportunities as well as Manjula's own sons. Although Manjula's elder son had requested her to start giving preference to them – her own children – she believed in the equal treatment of, and mutual help between family members.

In consequence, Manjula who had always helped and supported her mother by taking care of her younger siblings, in turn assumed that Manjula's widowed mother would now help her when Manjula's younger son was suddenly admitted to hospital and her elder son's wife was in her last months of pregnancy and needed support and company because the elder son was doing his professional training in another part of the

[207] H, 43, m, d/j, 2c.

region. Instead of providing support, Manjula's mother and younger brother started quarrelling with Manjula. They claimed that she had ignored and questioned them, given preference to her daughter-in-law and, finally, that she had cheated money from them due to the financial arrangements related to their late father's property and Manjula's sister's wedding arrangements. All this despite of the thousands of rupees Manjula had spent on her sisters, brother and mother over the years. After the row, the mother and younger brother moved into Manjula's younger sister's house, whose family together with Manjula's other sister, was also drawn into the conflict. Finally Manjula felt that all except her own sons and her daughter-in-law were either against her or upset by her.

According to Manjula, all this took place because of jealousy – the others were jealous of Manjula's daughter-in-law. Particularly, Manjula's mother found it difficult to put up with that Manjula's daughter-in-law had got such a loving husband (Manjula's son) and mother-in-law (Manjula) when she and her own daughters (mainly Manjula and another divorced daughter) had not been so lucky despite her efforts and their investments in dowries and marriage expenses. The mother had even told Manjula's neighbours that Manjula started neglecting them because of the daughter-in-law. Consequently, the daughter-in-law became very upset and so did Manjula – she felt bad for the sake of her daughter-in-law who had to suffer through no fault of her own during her pregnancy, when she would need the most support and she felt bad for the sake of her mother and for herself. She described her feelings:

> For the past 25 years I took care of them. Since the day I was born I have never stayed separated from my mother. … I am very attached to my mother emotionally. After all these problems I was very depressed and the other day I could not swallow food and could not drink water. When I go home I feel very bad because they [mother and brother] are not with me. But now I have decided to bother about myself and my children. I have another 12 years of service and I want to take care of my children." [she is crying.]

It is striking that Manjula's own mother found it difficult to bear that Manjula was becoming, first, a mother-in-law and, then, a grandmother. Perhaps this happened partly due to the confused family positions and the mother was jealous of the new daughter-in-law as she had become the first

object of Manjula's attention in Manjula's mother's eyes. Finally, even Manjula decided to prefer her own children to her other family members of mother and siblings. Other divorced and separated women who had also had children choose to maintain or strengthen their bonds to their children than to their siblings or parents if they faced the situation where they were forced to choose between them. For example, Honamma[208] who had stayed in her native village with her mother and brothers after her marital breakdown left their house immediately when she received the news of her ex-husband's death in order to attend his funeral and to move to live again with her five children. However, Honamma's brothers and parents got very upset because she left without consulting them, thus, they did want to hear anything from her anymore nor to help her in any way.

Only one woman, Aisa[209], let her mother take care of her one year old daughter while Aisa took care of the household chores. This arrangement was accepted by both of the women and was directed at the potential remarriage of Aisa. Aisa's daughter was taught to call Aisa as her elder sister, *akka*, and Aisa's mother as *amma*. Nevertheless, sometimes Aisa felt this to be contradictory as she understood it as a move towards her separation from her child; and she felt still too confused about her future following her sudden marital breakdown.

Next I will move to analyse whether these kinship tensions and conflicting family bonds also lead to intended as well as unintended changes and the challenging of the existing social order of gender and kinship hierarchies. Moreover, I will draw conclusions as to the possibilities of "the third" and "own" home for these women and, finally, how all these valorise the divorced and separated women's self-constructions as relational persons and the concept of personhood in South India.

Conclusion: Challenges to Family Hierarchies

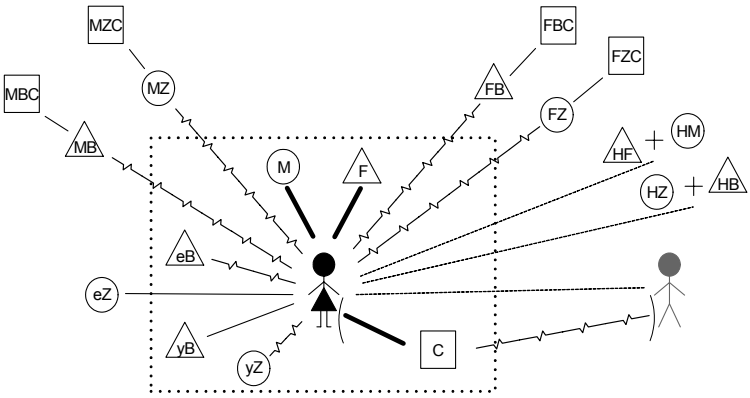
The divorced and separated women and their families are not immune to the disappointments of failed expectations of kin, perhaps partly due to the harmony envisaged at by the ideal of the complementary kinships system (see Trawick 1996, 185-186). At least both the expectations of reciprocity and the disappointments of its failure are constantly expressed

[208] H, 42, p, d/c, 5c
[209] M, 26, m, d/c, 1c.

in the women's formulation of justice within kin relations. The conflicts the women and their parents met with their siblings after each woman's moving back to her natal home illuminate the orders of preferences and loyalties within families. A Chart 6.1 illustrates an example of the central kinship bonds and tensions in a reconstructed natal home.

Chart 6.1:

An example of the central kinship bonds and tensions in a reconstructed natal home



Legend

Ego (the divorced/ separated woman)

Ex-husband

○	Female
△	Male
M	Mother
F	Father
Z	Sister/sisters
B	Brother/brothers
C	Child/children
H	Husband
W	Wife

Boundaries of the house

Ego's most central bonds

Ego's important but more neutral bonds

Ego's loosened or weakened bonds

Ego's bonds with tensions

The divorced and separated women's bonds to their mothers and fathers showed their durability – and the parents over three generations – repeatedly proved their loyalty towards their own children. The divorced and separated women's parents preferred their own daughters to their own sisters and brothers, who, likewise preferred their own daughters (and their chances of a good marriage), although they manifested their preference as a concern for the family's name and reputation. Similarly, the divorced and separated women's brothers' preferred their own daughters (and their chances of good marriage) and the well-being of their immediate family to their sisters, if they had to choose between their loyalties. Moreover, the women themselves preferred their own child/children to their sisters and brothers. The logic of this order of preferences and loyalties where the one prefers her/his immediate family, spouse and child/children to other family members failed only when the women's own marriage were in question: their husbands did not prefer them nor their children to the other family members, on the contrary, they gave preference to their mothers, sisters, brothers, brother's sons or the other woman (see earlier, Chapter 3). The disappointment of being rejected both by the husband and by the brother was reflected in the women's discontent with their brothers.

In general, evidence gained from the conflicts and tensions within natal families challenges the South Indian kinship ideologies from different angles, showing the ambivalence and multiplicity embedded in them. Firstly, it clearly shows the importance of the natal family to the woman throughout her life. Thus, it challenges the implications of women's complete incorporation in the kinship group of their husbands and their thorough dissimilation from their natal kin (e.g. Levi-Strauss's ideas concerning the exchange of women) but it agrees with Goody (1990, 480) that even in the "extremely" patrilineal societies of India (and China and the Islamic world) married women have long retained important moral and material rights and obligations with respect to their natal kin which are "carriers of property as well as sentiments, ties and relationships". This "continuity" of natal kinship and natal bonds is also repeatedly shown by South Indian ethnographies (e.g. Trawick 1996; Säävälä 2001; Kapadia 1996; Ram 1992). Furthermore, South Indian ethnographies (e.g. Trawick 1996, 171-187; Säävälä 2001, 107; Ram 1992, 83; Kapadia 1996, 18, 27) place the brother–sister bond – through generations – at the core of this continuation. A cross-cousin marriage and an uncle-

niece marriage further indicate this continuation – children of brother and sister can marry and a child can marry her mother's brother[210] -- as well as the ceremonial and practical importance given to the mother's brother, i.e. maternal uncle (Kapadia 1996, 18, 20-26; Dumont 1983, 86-89). Secondly, the evidence of my study shows the importance of the brother-sister bond at ideological level – it creates lots of expectations – but, nevertheless, the practical importance of a brother-sister bond is subordinate to the father-daughter and mother-daughter bonds. If these bonds are in conflict, preference is given to the one's daughter instead of one's sister. It is noteworthy that the earlier Chapters (3 and 4) showed that in conflict situations of disruptive marital relations, the bond between mother and child subordinates the bond between the husband and wife in two generations.

Furthermore, conflicts and tensions between siblings of different generations as well as their potential resolutions indicate a woman's existence as a sister and a daughter in socially essential ways. Neither marriage nor marital breakdown destroys the woman's vision of kinship although it does alter its practical consequences.[211] Marital breakdown as a concern of kin and as a concurrent concern of immediate family is materialized through the women of kin, through sisters and daughters of different generations. They challenge the continuance of kinship: the fragility of marriage as a means to procreate kinship becomes exemplified through them. Thus, consequences of one marital disaster spread into vertical as well as horizontal kin relations, threatening or even preventing potential marriages for other daughters and sisters within a kin. This will be further explored in the following Chapter 7 through the daughters of divorced and separated women. Evidently, the composition of the members of some reconstructed natal homes of the divorced and separated women are outside of the convention: too many unmarried daughters in their thirties, many female-headed houses and, at least one once-married adult daughter living again with her parents. However, while looking at the divorced and separated women's positions in their reconstructed natal homes – in their "third homes" – it becomes evident that the women are

[210] In South India a Hindu woman can marry her father's sister's son, her mother's brother's son or her mother's younger brother, i.e., her maternal uncle although there are variations in communities and castes regarding which forms of bilateral cross cousin marriage are preferred or possible.

[211] This idea has emerged from Chris Gregory's (2006) lecture "Sister's Son as Brahman, Gift Exchange in Middle India" held at the University of Helsinki.

able to improve their positions by fulfilling family responsibilities and acting in multiple family roles that both confuse and manoeuvre social order based on conventional gender, age and kinship hierarchies. Furthermore, their advice and their influences also spread beyond of their houses, to their cousins and neighbours, and to their sisters and their affinal families. Similarly, the divorced and separated women question the contemporary kinship and gender hierarchies, for example, by approving love marriages, questioning the marriage negotiation system and opposing the practice of offering a dowry.

Nevertheless, the conflicts with the women's mothers' and fathers' brothers and sisters as well as with the women's own brothers and sisters illustrate the vulnerability of a divorced or separated woman's position. No matter how blameless she is for her marital breakdown or how hard she tries to compensate for it, her homecoming harms the status of her family and the name of the house she returns to. At any time, any one of the family can make a remark about it and put the woman on the defensive. Therefore, the divorced and separated women could not ever truly, as I see it, consider their "third homes" within their reconstructed natal homes as a house of their *"own"* which would be a new cultural category for a South Indian woman, suggested in the beginning of this chapter.[212]

The Chapter 7 will look at the houses of the third of the women (18 out of 53) who were living together with their children, usually in their affinal home, and explores the bonds and tensions between a mother, child/children and a father (tensions of the affinal kin). First, I will examine how the divorced and separated women construct their "third home" through *their* kind of homemaking by nurturing or creating their bonds through the home-based transactions of living, feeding, sharing and caring. Then I will assess whether these "third homes" become their "*own* homes" to form a whole new cultural category for a South Indian woman. Secondly, I will explore kinship tensions within these houses. Thirdly, I will look at whether homemaking – agency and responsibility on behalf of the others – and kinship tensions and their resolutions may also lead to intended as well as unintended changes and challenge the existing social order of gender and kinship hierarchies. Fourthly, I look

[212] This is consistent with attitudes of divorced women of Dhagamwar's (1987, 86-89) study who were asked whether they feel "at home" in their parent's home before and after marriage. Only 5 out of 65 women considered their parental home as own home after marriage; noteworthy only 20 of them had considered parental home as their home even before the marriage.

how all this valorises the divorced and separated women's self-representations and self-constructions as relational persons and the concept of personhood in South India.

7. HOMES WITH THE CHILDREN

Homemaking through Children

Lalithamma's World

Lalithamma has plenty of pot plants and flourishing jasmine flowers growing in front of her green house, situated a the lower middle class area of Bangalore. Whenever I enter her house, I remember that I am entering into her world: *"For me, my home and children are everything. Once I get inside the house that is my world"*. Lalithamma lives in the house with her children, her friends, usually colleagues, or relatives – usually her brothers or step-sister or father – may well be visiting. Earlier, during the time of the Lalithamma's marital breakdown, her relatives never visited her or invited her to their homes or functions. *"But since I am now financially sound – a little rich – they invite me. Now I have extended a portion of my house. I have also constructed a shop and leased it out. So, my relatives respect me now,"* Lalithamma told me with a proud smile.

According to Lalithamma, her gossiping *"illiterate"* neighbours sometimes comment on Lalithamma's husband's leaving, which causes her to cry over it. Moreover, there are men who ask overly personal questions and make inappropriate suggestions, although Lalithamma says she never encourages them. Whenever Lalithamma goes out, she takes her children, or at least one of them, with her in order to discourage men from taking an improper interest in her. One night a strange man tried to enter their house. Lalithamma got very scared and called the police. She later bought a guard dog. Many times Lalithamma considered moving and changing house but decided to stay as *she* had not made *"any mistake"* – why should *she* feel bad or be afraid? In a new place she would meet new people and new speculation. Here people know her story and

at least some feel sympathy towards her. Besides, she knows the local police, who can help her if needed. Thus, she decided to stay and ignore the gossip.

At first, Lalithamma prefers to meet me for interviews in my "office", i.e. the hall of my home. However, once she learns to know me, my husband and my research assistant better – *"how casual you people are"* – she insists that we must come to her home every Sunday for lunch. On the Sundays that we go she is a very enthusiastic hostess. We sit around the kitchen table and she serves delicious *chapatti* bread, *biriyani* rice, non-vegetarian curries made of fish, lamb and chicken; and something sweet. Then she packs some of the food to take home with us. Her second daughter Rita (aged 19), who is mentally retarded and spastic, eats with us as she enjoys eating company. If the other children – Deena 21, Radha 16, or Ram 12 – are home they behave shyly and politely. They watch television, or Ram plays video games. Lalithamma bought an extra television after her husband left. She got it from her friend's husband who sells televisions at half the normal price. Now Ram plays video games with his friends *"who are studying in a good school"* whenever they are free. "*They like to come to our house as there is no one to disturb them,"* Lalithamma declares. The televisions are situated in a slim hall together with a sofa set, two cots and a divan. Behind the kitchen there is a bathroom and a bedroom. The hall was enlarged and the bedroom was constructed after Lalithamma's husband left nine years ago, as soon as the court ruled that Lalithamma could keep the house over her former husband who had also wanted to claim possession of it. Lalithamma still remembers how empty her house looked the day her husband left her – *"he left only dust behind him."* It was Lalithamma's colleague who advised her that she should not leave the emptied house and to move to her father's house, as she had first planned, because she had spend more money than her husband on the house. Lalithamma had not had any *"proper"* plan for the extra constructions: she simply constructed whenever she had the money and time for it. Whenever Lalithamma has little free time, she plans more alterations to her house. The water connection will be the next step. These days she may even have some free time. Earlier, when her children were smaller, she spent all her weekends washing their clothes. Nowadays she still cleans her house but her eldest daughter Deena is a great help. Deena also takes care of the home and Rita during the week. Lalithamma packs Ram's lunch and drives him to and from school on the back of her

scooter, because "*Shivajinagar* (the city area where the school it situated) *is not a safe place for a little boy"*. Luckily, Lalithamma's own work place is nearby. She works as a typist for the Postal and Telegraph Department. If there are some errands – paying a bill, buying a bus ticket and so on – Lalithamma takes care of them on Saturdays while her son is at school. As a clerk of the Central Government, she has her Saturdays free.

After the lunch we relax and talk casually – usually about Lalithamma's children. Time after time she recollects her years of struggle in order to take care of them and, further often she expresses her joy and pride: Ram is such a smart schoolboy, Deena is a responsible housekeeper for whom Lalithamma should find a good husband, and even Rita, who is Lalithamma's *"life long responsibility"*, is gradually learning new things and is becoming easier to look after. Sometimes we look at or take photos. There are a few photos in a small family album: Lalithamma on a pilgrimage to Tamil Nadu; Lalithamma with her son on an office tour (sent by her government employer) in Delhi; Lalithamma in a park with a badminton team; Lalithamma with her 1 or 2 -year old son at her parallel-cousin's (*dodappa's* i.e. father's elder brother's daughter) marriage ceremony; and Lalithamma in the *"shop opening ceremony"* of the house she constructed and rented to a shopkeeper in her neighbourhood. One Sunday Lalithamma showed me the only photo of her ex-husband: a ragged black-and-white wedding photo from 1976. Rita said *"Mami and dadd"* but Lalithamma put the photo away quickly. After Lalithamma's husband left, he never re-entered the house. However, he began to meet the children, first under a big tree nearby and later in his home. Lalithamma gave permission because "*they only have one father"*. Moreover, Lalithamma rationalized that giving permission would leave the children with no reason to blame her for losing contact with their father. Sometimes we take photos – when Lalithamma will tell her children to dress up and climb to a beautiful roof terrace filled with green pot plants. She holds her arms around them and looks both serious and proud.

Lalithamma highlighted the contrast between the inside world – her world – and the outside world – the world of others – when speaking about her house. Inside the house she and her children were safe whereas outside they faced threats and had to learn to deal with them. However, the division between the two worlds was porous: e.g. there was the stranger who tried to enter their house, and Lalithamma used to take her child/children with her when she stepped out of the house. Even during the restless time

of Raj Kumar's kidnapping, when the majority of people stayed at home particularly after dark, Lalithamma drove her scooter, with Rita sitting at the front and Ram sitting at the back, to fetch her newly-repaired mixer from the shop and to visit us – to bring delicious *kesari bhat* sweets, as she had promised.

Lalithamma, like the other women (18 out of 53) who lived together with their children, focused her homemaking on the children and on strengthening the bonds between her and her children. More than half of these women (10 out of 18) were lower middle class[213] (2) or poor[214] (8) and less than an half of them (8 out of 18) were middle class (6)[215] or upper middle class (2).[216] Most of them had paid jobs (13 out of 18). More than half of them (11 out of 18) had continued to live with their children in their affinal homes[217] whereas the rest of them (7 out of 18) were living in new housing. Next I will explore how these women's agency and responsibility were acted out through their ways of homemaking, how they were re-creating their positions both within and outside of their houses, and, how they were retaining their sense of self-worth and simultaneously – intentionally or unintentionally - manoeuvring the social order based on gender and kinship hierarchies and reconstructing their ideas of *dharma* and justice.

Housing, Money, Schooling

At first, the divorced and separated women's main concern was to ensure that they and their children had a roof over their heads either in their affinal home or in a new place (see Chapter 4): commonly first in a rented and later in a bought or newly-constructed house. Houses changed and grew together with the women's life situations. Thinking of what would be best for their children, some, like Lalithamma, invested their time and money in

[213] Zameela Begum (M, ~45, l, d/c, 6c), Amrita (H, 31, l, s/u, 2c).

[214] Salema (M, 24, p, s/u, 1c), Fatma (M, 35, p, s/u, 5c), Kalawati (H/C, ~45, p, s/u + w, 6c), Kusum (H, 38, p, s/u, 3c), Kaniz Fatima (M,~30, p, d/c + s/u 3c), Padma (H , 50, p, s/u, 5 c (1 died) her mother was also living with them), Sayabiran (M, ~36, p, s/u, 4c; her mother was also living with them), Honamma (H, 42, p, d/c, 5c).

[215] Lalithamma (H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c), Sheela (C, 54, m, d/j, 1c), Christina (C, ~35, m, s/u, 2c), Rathamma (H, 45, m, d/j-, 3c/1996 + H, 49, m, d, 3c/2000), Kamala (C, 39, m, s/u, 2c), Parsadi, H, 36, m, s/u, 3c.

[216] Aruna (C, ~45, u, s/u, 2c), Satyanarain (H, 47, u, s/u, 2c).

[217] One of these women, Honamma was sleeping outside of her children's house (see in detail later).

the house in which they were presently living: they constructed extensions, improved the facilities, bought household utensils and appliances, furniture or electricity if they could afford them. Constructing, renovating or at least furnishing a house was a way of gaining respect from others. In some cases, the house was a concrete marker of the woman's triumph over her husband, who had tried his best to gain control of the house and have the wife and children evicted. Thus, house itself had great symbolic and material value – it gave shelter and stability in an uncertain situation. Now the home was safer and more peaceful without the abusive husband but, on the other hand, lonelier and emptier and without financial support and male protection. The women often took precautions for their and their children's safety. Some women bought large, visible locks for their doors or a telephone, while others kept a large dog outside the house. Some women were very particular about the finding a house in a good safe area to live in – no matter if rented or their own – whereas, one educated woman, Parsadi[218] from a wealthy family background, earned pretty well (6000 rs / month) but lived with her three children in a very simple, dilapidated house in a poor area. She preferred to save for the children's future as *"my husband has not saved anything for my children".* She already had 50 000 rs worth of savings and her plan was also to construct a house within the next four years.

Money was the most important tool of homemaking for the divorced and separated women who were living with their children. At least the children should have a peaceful place to live, proper food and clothes, hopefully also the necessary equipment for schooling; and possibly something extra, such as books, television, nice clothes etc. The women worked and earned and took financial responsibility for maintaining their households. If possible, the women saved money for their children's future, for further education, marriage expenses or for constructing a house for them.[219] Through paid work educated middle class women, especially, also gained professional status or position. Their sometimes ambitious career plans were made for the benefit of their children, not for themselves. Moreover, they created and sustained important bonds with those colleagues who had supported them during the harder times. The colleagues' advice, encouragement, contacts and sometimes financial help were highly valued and

[218] H, 36, m, s/u, 3c.

[219] During the women's working days, the children were usually at school or, if younger, with their mothers in their working places or at home with the elder sisters. Some worked alongside their mothers.

considered equal. Similarly, the poorer women often received the same kind of mutual support from their neighbours.

The children of the poorest families worked alongside their mothers or for their mothers whose health had been ruined by heavy work and poor living conditions, and, yet, they could not always fulfil their basic needs. Also some elder or uneducated and now impoverished, middle class women did not succeed in finding suitable jobs and felt distressed because they had to send their children to work instead of school. If a child or children were the breadwinners of the house, the women took care of the housework and tried their best to make their children's work a lot easier: they took care of the everyday household chores, prepared their breakfasts, packed their lunch boxes, washed their work clothes and made their coffee, tea or dinner ready for when the child/children came home from work. Thus, they served their children in the same way as conventional housewives or how these women earlier had served their husbands and supported their husbands as the breadwinners of the family. Meanwhile some women tried to get alimony or maintenance from the ex-husband through the court process in order to bring money into their homes – following the court process was considered to be their "job".

Some poorer divorced or separated women who lived in the slum areas succeeded in saving money along with other women by a special, circulating loan-system called *chit.* Also other kinds of loans – some types of complicated systems for passing around money – were an important source of income, and later expenditure, when they needed extra-money, for example, for housing or for the marriages of their children. They also borrowed money from their neighbours in the case of emergency need. A couple of house maids were helped out by their employers. Some of the poorer women learnt to make use of the state provided facilities of ration cards or state sponsored loans or housing possibilities of which they became aware of through the women's organisation which worked in their area.

All divorced and separated women emphasised the importance of their children's education although in practice it was beyond the capability of the poorest women. The women were worried about their children's futures. Thus, they strived to get them educated and, if they succeeded, were proud of it and particularly proud of their smart, educated children. The home was place to support this task: the women encouraged and helped their children with their homework or made the elder children

help the younger ones. Other studies on single mothers in India also support this finding. According to Mehrotra (2003, 209; see also Vasavi 2002) single mothers in India show an exceptionally high motivation to educate their children. National statistics indicate that although female-led families have higher than average levels of poverty than other families and that their children are more likely to be engaged in wage-based employment than other children – these children are more likely to be attending school that their counterparts from male-headed households (Ray 2000 in Mehrotra 2003, 209). In female-headed families mothers have greater control over the family budget and children's needs are usually given first priority (Mehrotra 2003, 209). In consequence, the children of single mothers better learn to value their education (ibid., Vasavi 2002; Pothen 1987, 212-213).

Multiple Roles, New Family History

The divorced and separated women with paid jobs spent their spare time doing household chores. Just as paid work, housework was considered to be important because it was done on behalf of the children. From time to time, the women felt exhausted and overworked (see also Mehrotra 2003, 173). They alone bore the heavy responsibility of being their children's caregivers, providers and protectors. Consequently, the women regarded themselves as *"both mother and father"* to their children. One middle class woman commented after a long discussion we had with her neighbour about the difficulties of parenthood in today's Bangalore, where teachers are demanding and schooling is so expensive: *"As you heard, today it is very difficult to be just one parent and I have decided to be both mother and father to my child. I do not want these problems to affect my child."* Usually the woman was the unquestioned head of the house. However, the women's authority was not based on strictness or fear or conventional family hierarchy like their husbands' authority had been based on. Instead, there was more of an equal atmosphere of living and, often, struggling together, with more flexible role expectations towards each other. As I observed in some occasions, these mothers ate together with their children, not after first serving them like "standard" mothers would do (see e.g. Caplan 1985, 70-71) – or as these mothers had done when the husband was still living with them.

Some divorced and separated women seemed to have developed particularly close and intimate bonds with their daughters. They were grate-

ful for the mutual help and the equal kind of relationship they had with their now grown-up daughters: they consulted, comforted and encouraged each other. One upper class woman, Satyanarain[220], used to go out for coffee, shopping or movies with her daughters in their twenties or stayed at home – if they were too tired – cooking, reading or talking together. These mothers expressed how much they valued their daughters by both acts and words: they supported their daughters' educations and careers, encouraged and praised them (see also Mehrotra 2003, 209). Furthermore, following their mother's example, these daughters also learnt to carry out a very wide range of tasks and perform the different roles of the household and thus they were likely to be socialized in a less gender-biased way (see also ibid., 209-210). Moreover, a couple of poor divorced and separated women who were really close to their own mothers had invited their widowed mother to live with them (one accompanied with the children of the woman's late brother). In one of these houses, the woman, her mother and her just adult daughter were together making incense sticks at home for sale.

Overall, the women rejoiced in the relaxed atmosphere of their homes without the husbands. Usually the husbands had caused harm, either financial or through their behaviour, before the final break up. Now the women and their children – and the visitors whom they had invited – could breathe freely at home and "feel at home" in its more "causal" atmosphere. Satyanarain[221] welcomed her feminist as well as lesbian friends for long dinners where they not only talked freely but also had drinks and smoked if they felt like it.

Many women preserved their new family history – without the ex-husband – in the photos. Some had filled photo albums with photos of important ceremonies in the lives of their children: e.g. name giving ceremonies or the ceremony of a daughter's first menstruation; school happenings such as school trips, sport days, or graduation; or family functions that the woman and her children had attended together. Some had photos of their husbands but they did not show them any more. They had, however, at least a wedding photo somewhere safe as it was important evidence of marriage that could be needed in a future court process. If the women had visited some religious places with or without their children, there was a snap of the trip or a statue or the image of a god in the showcase or in the *puja* –room. If these women were religious,

[220] H, 47, u, s/u, 2c.
[221] H, 47, u, s/u, 2c.

the first thing they usually prayed for was their children. These women's lives were very home- and children centred. Nevertheless, they also maintained their bonds with their own parents, brothers and sisters, to whom they turned to if they needed help. The women wanted to keep their children in contact with at least their own natal family and kin.

A Home of Their Own?

The divorced and separated women maintained and strengthened their bonds to the children through daily interaction, sharing and transactions of housework and money. Thanks to their children, the women were not alone, or isolated, and, they had meaning and goals in their lives. Their agency was directed to being responsible for their children and their house. By the above mentioned responsibilities and activities of homemaking, the divorced and separated women constructed their "third home"– their sense of belonging, their sense of feeling at home. In doing so, they achieved their own positions within these houses not only as a mother but also as a father; the head of the family but a *female* head of the house. Thus, the divorced and separated women were manoeuvring the social order based on gender and kinship hierarchies and their homes became the stages of such manoeuvring.

These "third homes" of the divorced and separated women living together with their children were characterized by a number of aspects. Firstly, because of their anomalous status as divorced or separated women, the women altered the substance of their houses *merely* by means of their existence but also by means of transactions with the other members of the house. Thus, even if the women continued to stay in their affinal home with the children, not the house itself but "nature" of the house changed when their duties as wives and "marital obligations" were now replaced by their sole "duty" as mothers and with "motherly obligations". As a result, the families living in the houses were not conventional anymore – they each lacked the male head of the house. The houses were protected by the women and the children, and also by a guard dog, large visible locks and a telephone line to the police. Furthermore, without the conventional male head of the house, the atmosphere of the houses was considered more calm, *"casual"* and more tolerant and less hierarchical than earlier and it allowed more flexibility in terms of gender and age hierarchies. The women themselves were the heads of their houses, the gatekeepers of *"their own worlds"*. It was their shelter where they could

withdraw from exploitative interactions outside of the home, at least occasionally. Although those two worlds were sometimes porous, these houses were more 'closed' than the natal homes, where relatives, neighbours and friends kept on dropping in. Moreover, the most significant sharing and the most meaningful transactions with regard to each woman's self-construction as a relational person took place *inside* the house; under its shelter. The women controlled access to their houses and were more cautious of letting in people they did not know properly. However, the accepted friends, neighbours and relatives were warmly welcomed and hosted. Generally, Indian women are understood to be more open and exposed to mixing than men and more vulnerable to impurity: they must be protected and their sexuality needs to be contained, controlled and channelled by men and by the social structure toward procreation and the protection of the family (see Chapter 2; Harlan & Courtright 1995, 11; Lamb 2000, 183). Divorced and separated women were not controlled or protected by men and neither were their houses. As houses are believed to 'live' together with their inhabitants, the owner's substance influences the substance of the house. Consequently, I suggest that these houses became more feminine by their substance; in their character; and – like their owners – more prone to impurity or shame. Therefore, they required visual elements of protection and a greater control of access by the hostess of the house. Furthermore, these homes became flexible by their substance; in their character; and thus, anti-hierarchical and open to the interplays of selected friends or relatives. They could even become venues where the ideas of marriage and kinship were further challenged.

Secondly, many women who lived with the children considered and called their homes as their *"own"*. It was not their parents' or husbands' or in-laws' house but it was *their* and *their children's* house; their own *"place"*. In general, one's own children are in the central issue when it comes to a woman's feelings of what is a "home" – it is only after the birth of the child, particularly when the child is a son, that a woman feels her affinal home as being her own and the neighbours will describe the bride as having "adjusted well" to her family (Tiengtrakul 2006, 28). Although married women may feel that they have "a right to one's husband's house" in practice this right and feeling of ownership is conditional: their home is "theirs" as long as they get on with the husband or in-laws (Dhagamwar 1987, 89-90). In contrast, I suggest that in these reconstructed affinal homes this "right" to the matrimonial home, as well as the women's

established home position as mothers, creates a structural basis for the feelings of ownership. Some divorced and separated women emphasised they no longer even remember how it was when the ex-husband was still living with them. These "third" homes felt more their "own" than any other home for these women living with their children. The children are the ones that the women love the most and with whom they have the strongest bond. These bonds are nurtured with constant care, interaction and mutual affection, particularly after the marital breakdown. I suggest that this fundamental bond and sharing are principal factors regarding to the women's feelings of ownership – without which a house could not be regarded as their own home.

Although some women expressed the view that their responsibilities for the house and children were sometimes overbearing, they never considered themselves as *"slaves"* in these new houses – which for some had been the case in the affinal home with the husband and in-laws. There the women had considered themselves as being forced to work and they were often criticised for the results of their work. Moreover, they were working for the husband, the mother-in-law and other in-laws to whom they had initially wanted to bond themselves – and then later, when disappointed regarded this aim as impossible or useless. In contrast, practically the same household chores had been transformed from acts of slavery or humiliation into acts of love and care as soon as the women did them for the people they wanted to bind or rebind themselves with, as well as for the house they wanted to settle into and to make into their home.

The women made their homes also through "autonomy": by doing things the way they wanted, by paying for and preserving items and photos important to them and to their children. The feeling of ownership grew together with the level of the responsibility, whether or not the women owned the house. If a woman owned the house where she lived together with her children, it was considered as her permanent, if not the final, place. A rented house could also be considered as one's "own" house, with a temporary house keeping the dream of "a real home of one's own" alive. In fact, for some this was not simply a dream anymore but an achievable target. Money earned by hard work was an important marker of a home. Thus, I argue that there is no sharp contrast between money and home – and money and love – that, for example, Schneider (1968) has argued to exist in the West. According to Schneider (1968,

46), "home is not kept for money and, of those things related to home and family, it is said that there are some things that money can't buy! The formula in regard to work is exactly reversed at home: What is done is done for love, not for money! And it is love, of course, that money can't buy". In my opinion, the divorced women earn and make money in order to construct their homes with love, for the benefit of their dear ones.

On the whole, the divorced and separated women living with their children were able keep up their self-worth through creating a respectful position as a mother by taking on multiple roles and responsibilities for their children and home. Through this, they also made their "own" home and each woman was the head of it. This both confused and manoeuvred the social order based on conventional gender and kinship hierarchies. These divorced and separated women represented themselves most of all as mothers. They were mothers but no longer simultaneously wives. Conjugality may end but parenthood does not, as Kamala explained: *"He has the right to be called my children's father but he can never become my husband again. I cannot change myself. No one can change me. All feeling for him has died. Now, I am only a mother to my children. This is my final decision."* However, instead of the inauspicious status of being a divorcee they emphasize their most auspicious role as mothers. Due to the circumstances, being a "conventional" housemother was not possible for them. Instead, they became *"both mother and father"* to their children. They were manoeuvring culturally and socially motivated and shaped expectations and responsibilities concerning the male roles of husband and father. Simultaneously, they re-constructed the idea of motherhood to include the mother's ability take care of children both inside and outside of the house. Their kind of mother transcends the boundary between the public and private: a mother who functions well outside, in the public sphere and is also able to maintain a good home and growth environment for her children (see also Tiengtrakul 2006, 48). Thus, although the divorced or separated women's duties as parents, i.e. parental *dharma* do not differ dramatically from the general *dharma* of parents – all parents want the best for their children in terms of housing, money, education etc. – their social and cultural position defines the forms in which they carry the parental *dharma* out, for example, as *"both mother and father"*. Consequently, these mothers and their homes challenge the

social order based on the prevailing kinship and gender hierarchies and create alternatives to it.

It was inevitable that the women's marital breakdown, the making of a third home along with their children and the confusion of family positions would also create conflicts and tensions within the house as well as among the kin, particularly, in relation to ex-affinal kin. The children were both at the core of these conflicts and also at the centre of their resolutions, an aspect I will deal with in the next section. In the case of the divorced and separated women who were living with their children the main kinship tensions resulting from marital breakdown were leading to (1) confusion and contradictions about the "continuation" of personhood, gender and kinship and to (2) an uncertainty about the children's kinship position and sense of belonging between their mothers and fathers. First, I will look at how these kinship tensions can come to the surface by looking at the divorced and separated woman's dilemma of how to marry her children off.

Between Mother and Father

Children's Marriages

It is a parental *dharma* not only to provide the children with a home and house but also to arrange their marriages and, thus, to send their daughters out of the house considerately and to welcome their son's wives into the house or, at least into the family. However, through this parental duty – concerning marriage – the contradictions embedded in kinship were amplified. The divorced and separated women took the responsibility of arranging their children's marriages very seriously but considered it a heavy duty. Moreover, it was contradictory duty. Firstly, arranging children's marriages is considered the most important auspicious duty of the parents. The divorced and separated women who presented themselves mainly as "mothers" but also as "both mother and father" to their children sought to accomplish it but whilst doing so their self-sufficiency as "both mother and father" reached its limits at the later points in the marriage rituals or in symbolic gifts that both a mother and a father should contribute to. Further, among Hindus, in the case of a daughter, under the rule of *kanyādāana*, marriage becomes defined as a *father's* sacrifice of his daughter to the invisible world; the "gift of the virgin" is the gift of the *father*

(e.g. Trawick 1996, 150; Fruzzetti 1982, 17; Chapter 2.4.1). Secondly, as a means to re-make a kinship, arranging a marriage is a family issue and thus the women needed to involve family and kin – either their natal or ex-affinal kin – in it. Furthermore, from the male perspective, the purpose of getting married is to have offspring and the ultimate aim of marriage is procreation and regeneration of the patrilineage (e.g. Trawick 1996, 158; Säävälä 2001, 106). From the divorced and separated women's perspective this was contradictory because they no longer considered themselves as belonging to their ex-husband's patrilineage or his kin.

Thirdly, South Indian ethnographies show a "continuation" between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons; links of gender; the carry-over of female/male substance. For example, there is a common understanding in Marianad in Tamil Nadu that women are more closely related to their mothers, and men to their fathers, and this underlies the distinctions made between groups of same-sex and cross-sex siblings (Busby 1997a, 36-38). Children share blood and substance with both their parents but mother and father are differently connected to their children (ibid., 36). The links between mothers and daughters and fathers and sons are links of gender; gender itself is a substantial attribute and it is also importantly focused on the *reproductive* potential of women and men (ibid., 37). To her daughters, a woman passes on her female substance, her femaleness, a man passes on his maleness to his sons (Busby 1997a, 36-38; see also Daniel 1984, 176). Correspondingly, according to Trawick (1996, 163), a woman sees herself as a continuation of her mother and a man sees his son as a continuation of himself.

The divorced and separated women might have passed their gender and re-productive potential to their daughters. Each of them could be proud of being a role model of a good, but a different kind of mother, however, none of them could ever present themselves as an example of as auspicious wife to their daughters because they had failed to fulfil their wifely *dharma*, due to their husband's fault.[222] Disappointed in their own respective marriages, the divorced and separated women hoped something better for their daughters. They wanted their daughters to become both auspicious wives and contented mothers. In this manner, they wanted to forge "a continuation" between themselves and their daughters. Nevertheless, as presented throughout, these people are considered

[222] This is the divorced and separated women's point of view – they put the blame on marital breakdown to their husbands (see more, Chapters 3-5).

to be connected and thought to absorb and give out a part of themselves by means of substantial transactions such as living together, feeding, touching and exchanging words (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriott 1990). Thus, through homemaking and living together mothers and daughters had also absorbed and given out their substances and so influenced each other's substances and self-constructions as well as hierarchical positions. Particularly in homes, in interior Hindu spaces – defined through habituation, ritual and cooking – personhood is substantialized, renewed and potentially transformed (Säävälä 2005). Food, marriage, rituals and physical contact are the features that determine a Hindu's substance and hierarchical position, and I suggest these all are centrally tied to the space of the home (ibid.) and into forms of homemaking. Thus, a mother's inauspicious position as a divorced and separated woman may had affected her daughter's (substantial) position as well, particularly, as women in general are viewed as more open and permeable and thus more vulnerable to impurity, especially after puberty (e.g. Lamb 2000, 185). A woman's anomalous position as divorced or separated mother had definitely at least influenced her daughter's social position. Paradoxically, the divorced and separated women wanted to avoid passing their bad marital luck on to their daughters, and, yet, they were fully aware of themselves as the biggest obstacles to the daughters attaining a happy marriage. On the other hand, the divorced and separated women also considered "a continuation" of bad marital luck or bad marital habits from their exhusbands to their sons as a risk that they sought to diminish.

Fourthly, through painstaking homemaking the divorced and separated women had created a strong bond of mutual support with their children which they were now aiming to sever or at least radically transform through marriage – and were at risk of ending up living all alone.

In practice, with the purpose of arranging a good marriage, connections were essential in order to find a good candidate to be the groom; skills were needed to organize everything in a proper matter; and money required at least for wedding expenses if not for the dowry. An additional annoyance of the divorced and separated women was the rituals or tasks that the parents should perform – of how they should be deal with? Again, the consequences of each woman's marital breakdown affected the marriage arrangements of the daughters much more than the sons and thus gender was a critical factor in defining the marriage options of the second generation (see also Chapter 6).

Sons

Although some divorced and separated women had also sons to marry off, arranging such marriages were never mentioned as being the *"most demanding task"* or *"biggest worry"*. The woman were confident about finding good life partners for their sons because they – if anyone – knew that men have better positions in the marital market. They sought a girl from a *"slightly lower level"* when arranging their sons' marriages. Actually, even many women, from a poor to a middle class background, said that they preferred "*a poor"* but *"homely"* or *"cultured"* or *"good natured"* girl for their sons. One impoverished woman, Zameela Begum[223] explained,

> Our position is not very good at present. If I bring in a girl from rich family she would feel very superior and misunderstandings may take place. Therefore I prefer a girl from a poor family. I will not demand any dowry. I want to look after my daughter-in-law as my own daughter. I would prefer the girl to have completed at least the 10th grade (at school).

Manjula's[224] son was very particular about his marriage being within his mother's caste, a scheduled caste, although his father was from a higher caste and her mother preferred to hide her low caste position whenever it was possible. Thus, the son refused to carry on his father's lineage and to belong to his caste and considered his mother's caste as his own caste. He had referred to a proverb saying that one should marry even a monkey if it is from your own caste, perhaps pointing out his mother's mistake. Furthermore, the women simply reduced or gave up their demands for a dowry or even paid the marriage expenses[225] in order to find a suitable bride. One poor woman said she would demand 10 000 rupees worth of dowry to cover the marriage expenses but usually the women were against a dowry in principle. Actually, a son's marriage was never considered a financial burden as was a daughter's marriage. It is the sons that usually earn and thus the women could save for potential marriage expenses from these earnings.

The divorced and separated women clearly preferred the idea of an arranged marriage to that of love marriage for their sons and considered it more likely because of their own influences, the son's upbringing or even,

[223] M, ~45, l, d/c, 5c

[224] H, 43, m, d/j, 2c.

[225] See Chapter 6 about Manjula's son.

because *"it is not in my blood"*. Thus, marrying her son in a respectful way would prove that the son belonged to his mother and, thus, to the mother's natal kin having a good reputation. It would contribute their "continuation" in positive way as well as manifest each woman's success in order to fulfil her motherly mission and *parental* dharma. In contrast, a love marriage was considered harmful to the son's reputation because it would demonstrate his bond to his father and their negative image of each other; their hurtful "continuation". As Sayabiran[226] put it, *"If my sons go for a love marriage people may talk badly about them… People may say that because of his father's influence he is also like that"*. Rathamma[227] was disappointed because her son, who had lived with his father, *"had already been spoilt by my husband. At the age of only 16 years he had begun to drink and write love letters to girls."* Kusum[228] used to take her sons with her to the women's group's meeting so that they would get courage and knowledge about life and, particularly, about the difficulties that women face, thus, they would learn to *"respect women"*. She explained, *"I don't want my children's behaviour to become like their father's. I don't want any other women to suffer the problems I experienced."*

The divorced and separated women sympathized with their daughters-in-laws and wanted to be *"like mothers"* to them. Actual or potential daughters-in-laws were welcome to live with them and, yet, the women said they were also ready to accept the son's potential preference to live independently with his wife – they neither wanted to become obstacles to the son's happiness nor examples of possessive mothers-in-law –with which some divorced or separated women had themselves suffered. In practice, some women were nevertheless sad or fearful of the prospect of being left *"all alone"*.

The fathers, i.e., the divorced and separated women's ex-husbands, were not bothered about their sons' marriages at all. In consequence, no woman mentioned or talked about their sons as heirs who would carry on their father's lineage. However, the women waited for offspring and rejoiced over it: one wanted grandchildren to *"play with"* or another *"showed her love"* to her son's daughter love that she could not show to her own daughter because of their abrupt separation due to martial breakdown, thus the grandchildren could compensate for the loss of other

[226] M, ~36, p, s/u, 4c (one died).
[227] H, 45, m, d/j-, 3c/1996 + H, 49, m, d, 3c/2000.
[228] H, 38, p, s/u, 3c.

family bonds. On the whole, the main goal of the women's marriage arrangements was to make their sons happy.

Daughters

The main goal of the divorced and separated women's marriage arrangements for their daughters was also to make them happy. However, when their daughters' marriages were in question, their tone changed – many of the divorced and separated women were desperate. They spent sleepless nights thinking about it. They saved money and prayed to gods in order to solve this *"problem".* Even if the women had succeeded in making their daughters suitable brides-to-be by educating them or teaching them to work hard and by teaching them good housekeeping and good manners, they needed help from others in order to turn them into actual brides and auspicious wives through arranged marriages.

At this point, some divorced and separated women tried – once again – to contact their ex-husbands either directly or indirectly in order to engage them in marriage arrangements. For example, one poor woman, Sayabiran[229], thought that she could not make such a big decision by herself and she sent the proposing family to meet her ex-husband. The drunken ex-husband shouted at them that he does not have any relationship with the daughter – if she is *his* daughter at all. The absence or irresponsibility of the father vis-a-vis children's marriages left the women in dire straits. The fathers were remarkably nonchalant, considering the fact that children are thought to be part of their father's partilineage and that among Hindus the "gift of the virgin" is considered the gift of the *father.* Usually the fathers did not even turn up to their children's marriages.[230] However, Sayabiran's former in-laws helped her with the practical wedding arrangements and bought some necessary household items for the couple. Also some other poor women received small financial assistance or wedding gifts from their ex-affinal family, however, the main responsibility of marriage remained with the women. On the other hand, in those cases where the divorced and separated women's daughter was living permanently with her father, the father and his family, along with a new stepmother, took care of the marriage arrangements without even informing the mother or without inviting her into the wedding. Total non-participation in one's own daughter's marriage was considered painful not relieving. *"Through someone I came to know that*

[229] M, ~36, p, s/u, 4c (one died).

[230] Only two fathers attended their daughters' marriages.

he had arranged a marriage for my daughter but I don't even know who the boy is." Zameela Begum started crying and told me that she had followed her neighbours' advice to send her daughters to their wealthier father *"because otherwise he may refuse to take responsibility for the daughters later."*

The divorced and separated women usually approached their own natal family or kin, their *"own relatives"*, in order to get support in the marriage arrangements for their daughters. One poor woman, Kusum[231] succeed in finding a suitable groom, *"not these Bangalorian boys"* with the help of her distant relative who was a marriage broker in her home village. Another middle class woman, Kamala[232] considered herself lucky as she had a younger brother who was willing to marry the eldest of her three daughters.[233] The only serious obstacle in this marriage arrangement was Kamala's ex-husband, the girl's father, who had tried to interfere in the marriage arrangements in order to take ownership of the house where Kamala was living with her daughters. The husband's plan was to convince Kamala's brothers that, in order to cover the marriage expenses, the house should be put on lease and the women should move into a rented house instead. Kamala strongly objected to the plan. Finally, Kamala's youngest brother said he was willing *"to reduce his sister's burden"* by taking on full financial responsibility for the marriage arrangements. Also Kamala's other brothers and parents took part in the marriage arrangements and expenses. Thus, a traditional wedding of 500 guests was organized in Chennai where the brothers and the parents lived. The ex-husband could not be invited as none of Kamala's family knew where he was living with his new partner. However, Kamala personally went to bring the wedding invitations to the families of her ex-husband's brothers. Although they insulted her and refused the invitations, Kamala was particular that at least she had done her duty, so that *"nobody could blame her later"*. Kamala travelled to the wedding with her two other daughters and their friends. She enjoyed the wedding but stayed in the background. It was a Catholic marriage and so there was no ritual role for the mother. Moreover, she did not take part in the

[231] H, 38, p, s/u, 3c.

[232] C, 39, m, s/u, 3c.

[233] A rule of marriage to the elder sister's daughter mimics the structure of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage with a shorter cycle of reciprocity (Uberoi 1997c, 27). As noted earlier, the common denominator of most South Indian kinship systems is the preferred or prescribed cross-cousin marriage (Trawick 1996, 118-155; see Lévi-Strauss 1969 and Dumont 1983). In South-India, among people speaking Dravidian languages, in a large number of castes the first preference is given to a man choosing his elder sister's daughter as his bride (Karve 1997, 67).

haldi-ceremony, nor in other occasions where photos were taken. Later, the daughter complained about it. Nevertheless, Kamala had done it thinking what would be best for her daughter: if the mother were in the photos the next question would be – where is the father? – and she did not want her daughter to face that kind of situation. Kamala was deeply relived after her eldest daughter had started her marital life contentedly but wished that she had more younger brothers for her two other daughters.

A poor Hindu woman Padma[234] was unofficially "married" to her elder sister's husband, who later deserted her and continued his marriage with Padma's elder sister. Padma found a suitable candidate to be her eldest daughter with the help of her trusted friends. The groom, a motor rickshaw driver, came to meet the daughter and Padma approved of him. After that Padma's elder sister and her husband (i.e. Padma ex-husband/girl's father) played the role of the girl's parents: the elder sister invited the candidate to their house to meet them and marriage was arranged. In the marriage, they performed the rituals that a girl's mother and father are supposed to do because the father/Padma's ex-husband had refused to perform them with Padma. However, Padma paid 13 000 rupees worth of marriage expenses. She gave them to her elder sister's eldest son (i.e. bride's mother's sister son and bride's parallel cousin/step-brother) who carried the responsibility of making the arrangements. The rest of the expenses were paid by Padma's elder sister's sons and the ex-husband; the girl's father. Thus, although Padma and her elder sister had disagreements about the shared husband, this marriage showed how the children were excluded from that disagreement and the responsibilities related to them were shared.[235]

On the whole, the women who got their daughters – or sons – married, had found different solutions in order to fulfil the ritual roles of a mother and father in the marriage rituals. It was not only a question of replacing a missing father but a question of auspiciousness; or pf the "continuation" of auspiciousness. Manjula[236] explained this concept in relation to her sons' (and her younger sisters') marriages,

[234] H, 50, p, s/u, 5 c (1 died).

[235] See also Chapter 6 about Padma and manifestation of this principle in another context.

[236] H, 43, m, d/j, 2c.

> Some rituals have to be performed by a happy couple. People think that if a happy couple perform those rituals, the newly married couple will also live happily. They have a fear that if a divorced woman performs the ritual the same thing may also happen to them. I too do not want to perform certain rituals because I too have such a feeling. … I did not do any rituals which have to be performed by the mother. I allowed my brother [elder parallel cousin] and his wife to perform these rituals.

Sisters could replace each other in a ritual: if the divorced or separated woman had a married sister, she and her husband usually performed that role[237] and, in one case the daughter's/bride's married elder sister and her husband did it and in Majula's case (above) the daughter's/bride's mother's elder parallel cousin brother, i.e., Manjula's mother's sister's son and his wife performed the roles of bride's mother and father. In every case, these persons were happily married, belonged to the woman's natal kin and were related "sisterhood" (a sister of a mother, a sister of a daughter or a sister of mother's mother).[238]

Some divorced and separated women did not receive any help in arranging their daughters' marriages, neither from their ex-husband, former affinal nor natal relatives. In particular, the women from love marriages had commonly cut or, at least, damaged their family bonds and relations with all relatives. Moreover, the daughters who were born in an inter-caste or inter-religion marriage did not fully belong either to the mother's or father's family, caste or religion. For example, Lalithamma[239] belonged to a Scheduled tribe whereas her ex-husband belonged to a Scheduled caste. According to Lalithamma, nowadays when she has a house and does financially well, her natal relatives respect her: they visit her and invite her to their homes as well as to all important functions. I also witnessed Lalithamma's crucial role in her step-sister's marriage – she acted like the host at the wedding reception and had an important ritual role as she helped in tying a *tali*, the chain of the married woman in the main wedding rite. However,

[237] In a similar way, Madhu's (H, 38, m, s/u, 0c /1996 + H, 42, m, d/j, 0c/2000) sister and her husband replaced Madhu in the house opening ceremony of Madhu's and her father's newly built house (see Chapter 1). Moreover, the same sister with her husband had earlier replaced Madhu's mother and father in the marriage of their youngest sister because Madhu's mother had died before it.

[238] This supports Busby's (1997a, 38-40) analysis of relatedness based on the passing on of gender, in which a mother's sister is considered as a mother and parallel cousins as siblings because they share both mothering and fathering substance.

[239] H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c.

whenever the question of Lalithamma's own daughter's marriage arose, the natal relatives withdrew: no one wanted to help her to find a candidate or suggested any of own their affinal relatives which is a common way to find a groom (see earlier Chapter 2). Instead, they requested Lalithamma to find someone by herself or to ask help from her ex-husband's community. Lalithamma did so and kept trying her best but regretted *"her bad mistake"* more than ever: now her own daughter had to suffer for it. What if she does not find her daughter a suitable partner at all?

On the other hand, a couple of women who had had an inter-caste or inter-religion marriage decided that they would *not* arrange a marriage for their daughters. One opposed arranged marriages – and in fact, marriage in all its forms – whereas another could not even imagine herself arranging a marriage for her independent, journalist daughter. These daughters were to find their own ways, and in that, their mothers would give their support, if needed.

As a matter of fact, many divorced and separated women were ready to accept or support their daughter's love marriages although it was still considered unlikely. They emphasised the content of marriage more than the form of marriage. Thus, they did not worry about the (father's) lineage's reputation (cf. Srinivas 1999, 142) but only about their daughters' happiness. The husband's good nature and habits, as well as mutual understanding were more important. Due to their own increased life experiences, they knew either kind of marriage can succeed or fail. Some women wanted their daughters to do things in another way to their own marriages. For example, Kusum[240] let her daughter meet her husband-to-be and as they liked each other the marriage was made. Thanks to her increased life-experience she was confident about their happiness: *"By looking at the person's face I can make out whether he is good or bad. My son-in-law is a very good human being, exactly opposite to my husband*". She did not give any dowry because it was *"against my principles as a worker of the women's organisation"*. Also other women stated that they were against the use of a dowry. With the exception of a few well-earning middle and upper class women, the giving of a dowry was simply beyond the financial capacity of most single mothers. At least partly, I suggest, this made them anti-dowry and pro-love marriage, as no dowry is given in love marriages. The merest marriage expenses were often too much. Poorer women, sometimes together with their mothers, collected money for marriage expenses from different sources: they approached a

[240] H, 38, p, s/u, 3c.

mosque or women's organisations or turned to their employers, particularly, if they were working as house maids. Kusum (above) had no other choice than to sell her house in order to cover the marriage expenses.

In summary, the divorced and separated women approached their available set of family networks in order to arrange their daughters' marriages. In a few cases, the women were helped by their ex-affinal family but usually it was the women's natal families or their *"own relatives"* who helped them, if any did. Thus, the importance of the women's natal family and natal home, and the continuation of the bonds created and maintained there – despite their transformation by marriage – were again emphasised (see earlier). In fact, the system of close-kin marriage – marrying within a family and strengthening existing bonds – turned out to be the most feasible way of getting a daughter married from an angle of the divorced and separated mothers. It would contribute to the continuation of the mother and daughter in a positive way and even to keep them within same family. On the other hand, daughters' love marriages were considered as the only option for those women who had – usually by their own failed love marriage – cut or harmed their family relationships so that their daughters were, in turn, considered as outcast in the marital market. These daughters were considered as belonging neither to their mother's nor their father's kin, in the strict sense of the term. Consequently, each generation would be pushed further away from the family network of marriage arrangements. Moreover, some of these women considered themselves as already distanced from these arrangements and preferred – or thought that their daughters would prefer – a love marriage, if any marriage at all. In the case of the daughters, a love marriage would (potentially) contribute to the ending of bad marital luck between the daughters and their mothers. The divorced and separated women tried to avoid passing their bad marital luck on to their daughters by careful marital arrangements, if possible, but also by distancing themselves in the actual marriage rituals – Kamala kept herself out from photos leaving no evidence of attending her daughter's marriage and some other women requested a close-kin relative to replace them in the ritual role of the bride's mother. A divorced or separated woman is no longer a *cumankali,* an auspicious wife, in the strict sense of a term, and thus her active role in the most central most auspicious ritual, marriage, could not only be symbolically anomalous but also hurtful to a couple's happiness. These divorced and separated woman who represented themselves most of all

as mothers and to whom the accomplishment of a daughter's marriage was the biggest triumph and fulfilment of their motherly duty, ended up, paradoxically, denying themselves ritually as mothers at the weddings of their own daughters.[241]

On the other hand, the option of either a giving dowry (daughters) or receiving a dowry (sons) determined the marriage opportunities of arranged marriages to a great extent even if the women were *"against the dowry"*, against either giving or receiving it. It made it possible for women to "prefer" an arranged marriage to a love marriage for their sons. The divorced and separated women were against their son's potential love marriage as it would contribute into the harmful continuation between the son and his fathers whereas the son's arranged marriage would contribute to the positive continuation between the son and his mother. Each woman interpreted their son or sons' actual or potential arranged marriage as a positive outcome of their upbringing and influence or as manifestation of their good "nature". An arranged marriage would bind a son, as well as a mother, to a web of kinship reciprocity, including new affinal relations. It could even improve the woman's family position by making her into a mother-in-law and a grandmother, particularly if a married son continued to live in their house along with his wife. Potentially a son would fill up the house with his wife, future offspring and wealth (the son's own salary and his wife's dowry, even if one was not requested) and whereas a daughter would empty the house by leaving it and taking a potential dowry along with her. Thus, the marriage prospects of the divorced and separated women's children clearly illustrate the prevailing kinship and gender ideologies and hierarchies as well as their concrete implications. After the dilemma of how to marry off their children and thus to send their daughters out of the house or to invite their son's wives into the house, I will continue looking at the kinship tensions resulting from the children's unclear position between their mothers and fathers, between two houses and two families.

Conflicts with the Children

One rainy night Lalithamma – the proud mother and Sunday hostess introduced at the beginning of this chapter – knocks at our door. Her

[241] This is similar to Madhu who succeeded in constructing herself a house with her father but who did not take part in the main ritual of the house opening ceremony (see Chapter 1).

good life situation has turned up side down. With a cheek swollen from toothache, a wet face, and eyes full of tears, Lalithamma looks as desperate as she sounds: *"Now my own children have turned against me, my own son and my youngest daughter. My [former] mother-in-law and [former] sister-in-law have poisoned their minds against me. Last time [when we met] I was so happy: I had my house and wonderful children. Now the situation is as bad as it was 15 years ago. My own children now blame me, after all the things I have done for them."* Now Lalithamma regrets that she let her children keep in touch with their father and his family, and particularly with his mother and sister. She thought it was in the children's best interests as he was *"the only father they have"* after all, but the new situation was now the unintended consequence of it. Bitterly wipes her eyes and she asks: "*What was the point of struggling for the children?"* In addition, the roof of their house had broken and water was dripping from the ceiling.

If the divorced or separated women were in a serious conflict with their children, it was blamed on the ex-husband and his family. First of all, there were those divorced and separated women (10 out of 50) who had been forced out of the marital house without their children or whose husbands had later *"kidnapped"* children. These women considered losing a child as the biggest ordeal of their marital breakdown. Leaving their children behind was done in the children's best interests at the moment when a woman felt too unsure about the future (see Chapter 4). However, the women interpreted it as the biggest sacrifice they had made in their lives. Later some of the women regretted such decisions deeply while others were still confident that it was best for their child or children as the husband was able to provide them with better material support and an education. However, the women could not talk about their children without tears in their eyes. Particularly, losing a daughter or daughters made the women feel incomplete; they missed the closeness and mutually beneficial continuation between themselves and their daughter/s. For example, Pushpa[242] kept thinking about her 8- and 10-year-old daughters, who her husband had *"kidnapped"*, throughout her lonely days at home and about how much the daughters must be suffering and how much she is suffering while being separated (see Chapter 5). She referred to their physical, pre-natal connection and her (now lost) ability to protect them: *"They should invent a pill that by taking it your children would*

[242] H, 30, m, d/j-, 2c.

stay in your stomach, within you and near you as long as you know that it is worth for them to come out into the world." On the other hand, the women were worried about the harmful continuation between themselves and their daughters: how would their daughters be treated or brought up by their ex-husband who had mistreated them and who disrespect women in general. After seven years of a frustrating, and ultimately unsuccessful legal battle to get custody of, or at least visiting rights for her daughter, Rathamma[243] proclaimed in the publication of women's organisation that in her case *"the court denies a woman her basic right of access to her daughter"*.[244] Rathamma's daughter reached her age of majority (18 years) during the court process. She did not want to meet Rathamma because she believed her father, who claimed that Rathamma had left them because of other men. Recently, the deeply-hurt Rathamma heard that her daughter had delivered a girl baby. *"Now she will begin to understand, now she will come to know how I felt,"* Rathamma commented, hoping that her daughter's own motherhood would finally reunite them, after more than ten years of separation. Later over half of these women (6 out of 10) succeeded in reuniting with either some of their children (3 women) or with all of them (3 women).

With one exception[245] all divorced and separated women who were not living with their children wanted to keep in touch with their children – usually by visiting them at school and giving them small gifts and sweets or by phoning or e-mailing them – whereas all ex-husbands were strictly against it. Problems started, if the father found out about the secret meetings between the mother and children. Some children asked their mother to stop the visits as the fathers had beaten or threatened to

[243] H, 45, m, d/j-, 3c/1996 + H, 49, m, d, 3c/2000.

[244] Under Hindu Law the father is the natural guardian of his minor legitimate children whereas the mother is the natural guardian of the minor illegitimate children and the natural guardian of her minor legitimate children if the father is dead or otherwise incapable of acting as guardian (Diwan 1998, 257-258). In access and custody of the children the paramount consideration is the welfare of the children: the ordinary rule is that a child below five should be committed to the custody of the mother (ibid., 259). Under Muslim Law, in sects of both Sunnis and Shias, the father is recognized as the guardian and the mother is not recognized as a guardian even after the death of the father whereas although first and foremost right to have the custody of children belongs to the mother, and she cannot be deprived her right as long as she is not found guilty of misconduct (ibid., 267, 271-272.)

[245] This woman was falsely accused by her teenage daughter in the police station of once having been a prostitute and of also pressing her daughter to become a prostitute. After this the woman did not want to be in touch with her daughters.

beat the children because of them. Moreover, the women were themselves assaulted, for example, Rathamma's[246] husband threatened to pour acid in her face when she tried to meet her daughter on her birthday and Honamma[247] was beaten up by her husband's "friends" or tortured by bribed female police officers whenever she made an effort to meet her children. Similarly, the fathers did not allow siblings to meet each other if some of them were living with the mother, not even twins who missed each other in one case.

In contrast, if the children were living with the mother and their father and the ex-husband wanted to meet them at some point after the marital breakdown, the women did not object to it. They thought that it was in the children's best interests, as he was *"the only father they had"*. The women emphasised the physical connection and moral ties between a father and child that (should) remain despite the marital breakdown. A father had the "*the right to be called my children's father"* (Kamala, see earlier) but a father has also duties – financial, ceremonial, educational etc. – towards their children, his fatherly *dharma* to fulfil. As a result, some women tried to create a financial bond between the children and their father. They started a court process in order to get maintenance or some share of the husband's property for the children, or alternatively did not request anything so that *"When my son reaches his majority, my son may demand his right. It is not demanded [yet], it is his right* (see also Maunuksela-Aura 2004). Through their father, the children could maintain their relationship with his family; i.e. the children's paternal kin. In the rare case of some of the poorer women, some ex-affinal family members, i.e. an ex-husband's brother, supported the children and invited them to their house, even against the ex-husbands' wishes, although usually the ex-husbands' families stood behind them. However, some of the women tried themselves to maintain a formal bond between the children and their paternal kin. For example, Lalithamma invited her ex-husband and his family to her step-sister's wedding even though a new conflict had already occurred, and other women invited their ex-husbands or their ex-affinal relatives to their children's marriages. The women wanted to keep alive at least something of the bond between the children and their father and/or their parental kin and leave room for potential re-union, if

[246] H, 45, m, d/j-, 3c/1996 + H, 49, m, d, 3c/2000.
[247] H, 42, p, d/c, 5c.

not now then perhaps later. Thus, the women also emphasised that they wanted to ensure that their children would not blame them later.

Nevertheless, according to the women, in most cases the ex-husband did not have any contact with his children who were living with their mother: he did not meet them nor give them anything, neither money nor gifts. The ending of gifts and financial support signals end of such relationships and these fathers did not make any distinction in their treatment of the ex-wives and children but lumped them together while they were living together (cf. Simpson 1998, 118). Instead of support, some husbands tried to gain the house or other facilities from their children. For example, Kamala's[248] husband applied for voluntary retirement to frustrate his wife and daughters' chances of receiving maintenance. Finally, the husband even succeeded in throwing Kamala's and the daughters out of the house despite Kamala's strenuous efforts to secure their living quarters (see earlier description).[249] Some children, usually the elder sons or daughters, who had personally observed or experienced their father's cruel misbehaviour, did not even want to have any contact with the father – they said that they had no father anymore. On the whole, the children who lived with their mothers seemed to be genuinely loyal to mothers.

Many divorced and separated women felt sorry for the children because of their father's neglect of them. Thus, if the father later wanted to re-establish his bond with the children – in one way or another – the women tried to let it happen. The only condition the women put on the meetings was that the ex-husband would not enter their homes anymore. Thus, the children met their fathers outdoors or at the father's house. In fact, meetings with the father usually led to conflicts between the children and the mother. According to Lalithamma (see earlier description), Ram returned to his sense and returned home after a while whereas Radha (16 years), *"who is just like her father: she wants an easy life and no responsibilities",* was still living with her father to her mother's great misery. Recently, the lives of the other children were also confused by

[248] C, 39, m, s/u, 3c.

[249] The husband's strategy was to forge documents which "proved" that he had sold the house to his brother a year earlier. Then the brother approached the court and managed to get a court order to make the previous owner, i.e. Kamala's husband, to forcible vacate the house. Finally Kamala's husband (sic) came with a van, along with a police man and forced Kamala to vacate the house. Kamala ran out to call the women's help line. Meanwhile the husband brought all his things in, occupied the house and did not let either Kamala or her daughters enter the house anymore.

the ex-husband. He tried to get hold of the compensation paid for their mentally retarded daughter, Rita, and he used the eldest and *"the loyal"* daughter Deena as the mediator for his threats – without the money he would get a legal divorce from Lalithamma. The closer the bond between the children and their father developed, the looser the bond between the mother and children became. As argued in this study, a house or home is the most important venue for maintaining and strengthening these fundamental bonds. Correspondingly, if the children moved to live with their fathers – or had moved in with him after the marital breakdown – they became a part of his house through his and his family's way of homemaking and homely transactions and daily sharing of experiences. In these situations, a husband and his family would *"poison the children's minds",* as the women expressed, so that the children started to believe bad things about the mother and, usually, about her *"character"* – she was labelled as *"a bad mother"* – and, finally, the children did not want to meet her or to live with her anymore.

As stated earlier, owning a house is powerful way of homemaking. Moreover, houses are believed to 'live' together with their inhabitants and thus, the owner's substance influences the substance of the house. Taken together, I will show below how the father could also bind his children to him by giving them the whole house after his death, as happened in some rare cases[250].

In Sheela's[251] case, her daughter who had a well-paid job let her unemployed mother live in the house, gave her monthly *"pocket money"* as compensation for everyday chores such as bank or laundry visits or watching over the home while *"the old man"* brought water to the house that still lacked running water. However, the daughter was usually out, working most of the day and she also often ate out. Thus, the daughter did not look after Sheela's daily livelihood and, for example, bought a big and expensive music system for her private use instead of a refrigerator. Moreover, whenever they had a disagreement, which was usually about money, the daughter stressed that it was *her* house. She emphasised that the father himself had made it clear that he would not want his ex-wife to live in the house. Thus, the daughter felt that she had the right to

[250] In addition to these examples, one father left a house (one of many) to his eldest, illegitimate daughter born to Kalawati, a poorer woman of this study. Earlier, he had not kept any other contact with the daughter, except for a visit and a small gift at her marriage. This inherited house was, nevertheless, claimed by his 'official' family.

[251] C, 54, m, d/j, 1c, more about Sheela in Chapters 5 and 8.

throw her mother out of the house if she wished to do so. Once she even contacted the police in order to do so.

In the second case, the poorer Honamma[252] had divorced her abusive, alcoholic husband by order of the *panchayat* and moved with her children to her parents' house, situated in a nearby village. Later the husband forcibly captured the children and brought them back to Bangalore. Whenever Honamma tried to meet the children, the husband prevented it through violence or the threat of violence (see earlier about beatings by husband's friends and torture by bribed police officers). As soon as Honamma's daughter brought her the news of her ex-husband's death, she returned to Bangalore in order to attend the funeral and to start to live with and to take care of the children after a three-year break. Honamma's parents, sisters and brother got upset because she decided to leave so quickly and without consulting them, and they did not want to hear from her anymore. However, the children did not allow Honamma to enter their house, which was in fact purchased with her money. The children repeated their father's words and the rumours about Honamma's character and they did not believe Honamma or the neighbours who tried to convince them of her innocence. For two years, Honamma had slept outside of the house – in all weathers – eaten hotel food and taken baths in her neighbour's house. She still hopes that one day her children will discover *"the truth"* and accept her back into the house.

In both cases, the house itself became a living symbol of the dead father and his wishes. The women tried to adjust to the unpleasant and unjust situation. They seemed to trust that the bond between the mother and children would hold anyway and that the children would turn back to their mother and resolve the situation in the future. As the women had strengthened their bonds to the children by nurturing them painstakingly throughout a difficult marriage and also after the marital breakdown, they believed that their bonds to their children were firm. They thought that the death of the father would reunite them because the main obstacle of their meetings, i.e. the father, was gone and the main venue for close familial interaction, i.e. the house, would be given to them. As a result, these women also assumed that the house of the father, if given to the children, would naturally belong to all of them. In these cases, quite the opposite happened: the houses bonded the children closer to their late fathers. The earlier situation was turned upside down

[252] H, 42, p, d/c, 5c.

as the mothers now became dependent on their child/children and their inherited house, while the children's minds also turned upside down, more in favour of the late fathers and against their mothers. According to the women, these children seemed to have forgotten the state of affairs preceding the divorce. Or in each case the children came to believe the earlier words of their late father and his family members or the rumours more than words of the mother. The women experienced a bitter failure of reciprocity: the houseflows – the gifts, goods, services, and love that sustain homes and relationships – were blocked before they could flow back to them and thus, in the end they received nothing in return for their struggle for their children.[253]

The women represented conflicts with their children allegorically in terms of their marital breakdown or marital crises, and sometimes their children as a continuation of their father. While living with their father and while owning his house, the children's behaviour and attitudes started to increasingly resemble their fathers; they became like an extension appendix of their fathers. These women, like other women having conflicts with their children, commented bitterly on how they first suffered at the hands of their husbands and then at the hands of their own children; the harmful "continuation" between the children and their father had thus become materialized. Also other women commented that their children were *"just like their fathers"* when they behaved in an undesirable and, particularly, in a selfish way.

Due to the intensity of the bond between the divorced and separated women and their children in those cases where they were living together, as well as due to these women's self-representations as mainly 'mothers', the women experienced conflicts with their children as painful and destructive. As discussed earlier on the development of "relational" individuals through responsibility (Chapter 4) and as also suggested by Mehrotra (2003, 208) regarding single mothers, even their "individualism" or "autonomy" develops within a context of continuing relationships and commitments with their children: it strengthens rather than weakens bonds of personal connectedness and emotional anchoring. Initially children were dependent on their mothers but eventually the mothers became dependent on them. Although this is not necessarily exception-

[253] See analogy to Lamb's (2000, 75) description about the loosening of the mother-son bond because of the son's wives.

al,[254] the missing marital relationship – the other strong bond of intensive and intimate transactions – which usually balances or competes with the mother-child relationship – further strengthened this development. Furthermore, as Mehrotra (2003, 211) points out in her study: single mothers are sometimes so overworked that they fail to build up social connections and activities apart from their children. This can lead to a personal crisis at the point when the children no longer require close attentive care (ibid.). The situation is even more severe, when the children start to unbind themselves from their mothers as representatives of their late fathers. Thus, in addition to struggling mother and *"both mother and father"* some women started to represent themselves as victims and "sacrificing" mothers. Although "the sacrificing mother" is a common cultural representation in India (see e.g. Das 1997, 202; Lamb 2000, 78), it was even more accentuated among these women. Lamb (2000, 78) uses of stories of beggared and forgotten mothers as metaphors conveying a loss of love: mothers will always love and give their children more that they are loved and given in return; and women as wives and mothers give all of their lives, never receiving as much as they have given. The divorced and separated women who had had conflicts with their children or who had been separated from their children, presented themselves as models of these kinds of sacrificing, unfortunate mothers.

Conclusion: Dividing Kinship

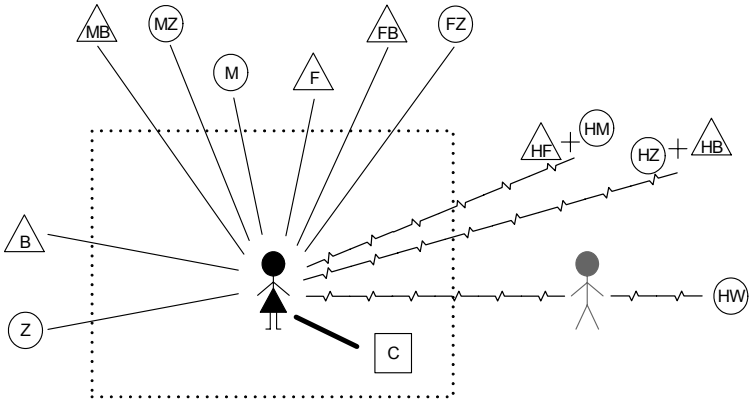
The houses of the divorced and separated women 'lived' with the women's changing life situations, sometimes concretely: Lalithamma's house grew bigger as her financial situation improved, and then later the roof of her house fell in just as her bonds to the children were breaking. Women's bonds to their children made up the foundation of their houses. These grounds were nevertheless vulnerable. Through different forms of homemaking, the women nurtured their bonds to their children, and yet prepared themselves to loosen these bonds in the future. Some women's bonds to their daughters seemed particularly close and tender, and yet the women did their best to transform them by marrying their daughters off. Moreover, sometimes these houses were vulnerable due to the

[254] According to Das (1997, 202), it is often stated among Pujabis that the strength of the bond is stronger for the mother than for the child.

ex-husband, as shown earlier. Some of the ex-husbands tried to reclaim the house – without its habitants – in a very concrete manner. Furthermore, the children's bonds to their father – both cut and existing – cast a shadow over the houses. A Chart 7.1 illustrates an example of the central kinship bonds and tensions in a reconstructed affinal home.

Chart 7.1:

An example of the central kinship bonds and tensions in a reconstructed affinal home



Legend

Ego (the divorced/ separated woman)

Ex-husband

○	Female
△	Male
M	Mother
F	Father
Z	Sister/sisters
B	Brother/brothers
C	Child/children
H	Husband
W	Wife

Boundaries of the house

Ego's most central bonds

Ego's important but more neutral bonds

Ego's loosened or weakened bonds

Ego's bonds with tensions

Based on these women's narrations, there seemed to be a fundamental difference between the attitudes of the mothers and the fathers. The mothers who where living with the children let their children maintain or recreate the bond to their fathers if both parties wanted it, whereas the fathers did not let the children who were living with them maintain any bond to their mothers even if both the mother and children wanted to do so. The other difference between the mothers and the fathers was that, where the children were living with the father, all except one mother wanted to maintain their bonds to the children by secret meetings and the giving of small gifts and sweets, whereas it was exceptional that the fathers wanted to keep in touch with their children[255] who were living with the mother – and in such cases they always succeeded in doing. In what follows I will analyse the consequences and explanations of these differences between a mother and father.

First, the divorced and separated women who allowed or preserved the potential for recreation of the bond between children and their father, said that they wanted only the *"best"* for the children, and nurturing the bond to *"the only father they had"* was considered as a positive value. Most probably the women were thinking about their children's need to be a part of the father's family and lineage – to have a position – or their need of a house or of other finance that they would attain if the bond to the father was preserved. In consequence, the women tried to act in order to avoid becoming the object of their children's potential blame and other future problems relating to their unclear position. Thus, the women themselves were preserving the prevalent partilineal kinship system by emphasising a father's rights and duties over their children but, on the other hand, they were questioning it by not giving up their own rights and duties as mothers over their children. Thus, they were creating a co-existing "maternal" kinship system where the mothers as well as

[255] The growing tendency for fathers to move out of the web of family ties and obligations following divorce is also common in Western world, e.g. in England where the central explanation lies in the changing position of men within the family (see Simpson 1998, 84-104). Several researchers have suggested that women benefit considerably from the power structure which they create and control in the domestic sphere (Ribbens 1994; Stacey & Price 1981, ref. in Simpson 1998, 102). Women may feel that they control children and men that they – as fathers – are dependent on women; they face "paradox of patriarchy" (Lewis & O'Brian 1987, 6) whereby a father's position and role within the family is also the primary constrain on him being a central character within in, that is then further accentuated for the non-custodial father (Simpson 1998, 101-104). Although Indian men also face some kind of "paradox of patriarchy" I suggest that power dynamics between mothers and fathers works there differently.

their natal kin were given practical preference although the importance of (the missing) father and affinal kin was acknowledged at an ideological level materialized in a way in which the women left a door open for the potential reunion of the children with their fathers and paternal kin.

The second explanation could be formulated by making use of the idea that persons and selves are connected substantially with other people, places and things of their lived-in worlds in India and that by means of substantial transactions with other persons, such as living together, feeding, touching, exchanging words, people are thought to absorb and give out a part of themselves (e.g. Daniel 1984; Marriott 1990; see earlier Chapters). I suggest that such transactions with one parent may make transactions with the other parent problematical. The closer and more frequent interaction a child has either with her/his mother or father, the more transactions take place, and thus, more their substances are mixing and, finally, they start to "resemble" each other "substantially". As homely transactions between a mother and her children, such as feeding and nurturing, are more direct and intensive than indirect transactions between a father and his children (see Chapter 2), and, as Lamb (2000, 18) points out, as a woman's relative openness emphasises not only her receptivity but also their diffusion, mother's substance may be more "transformative" to her children. As Lambert suggest (2000, 80-3) in her study in Rajastan, North India, starting with the ingestion of breast milk, a child comes to share the bodily substance of its mother through maternal nourishment (e.g. Fruzzetti, Östör and Barnett 1992, 13 in Tamil Nadu; Busby 1997b, 262-3 in Kerala). Breast milk is an especially effective medium for the transmission of qualities and effects (ibid.). According to Lambert (ibid., 81), although these nurturant relations cannot supersede children's primary identification with their father's house and lineage, what a child is like as an individual is considered to be more significantly shaped by its mother, owing to what are considered to be the natural connections produced through gestation and breastfeeding (see also Das 1997, 200-202). Breast milk – and later feeding and food sharing, I suggest – is itself constitutive of relatedness: it expresses degrees of relatedness as well as makes and marks the bonds of affection.

Perhaps, the non-custodial fathers consider that their children are sharing too much ("substance") with their mothers – they are like a "continuation" or extension of their mothers – and the fathers would prefer to avoid all transactions (contacts, talking, money, gifts) with them and

thus, the potential sharing of such substances with the children's mother, their ex-wife, that could be "mediated"; absorbed by the children. In consequence, if a father starts transactions with his children he also aims to end transactions between the children and their mother. The Indian father seek to avoid the situation where the role of (the non-custodial) father is mediated by that of the mother, as is the common situation after a divorce in the Western world, for example, in England (Simpson 1998, 102). That kind of situation would increase interaction between spouses in the form of "exchanging" children. Usually the father succeeds in it, as the prevalent kinship and gender hierarchies seemed to allow fathers more options to manoeuvre their paternity. On the other hand, contact-avoiding fathers also accentuate a woman's strong position as mother who greatly influences her children's lives, also by her sharing substances with children. The father in the previous Chapter who declared to the proposing family that he did not have any relationship with his daughter – if she is *his* daughter at all – could be interpreted as a father who questioned his paternity by denying his social as well as biological connections to his daughter. However, his comments may also lead to another construction: social connections and substantial transactions with the mother had started to reduce the meaningfulness of the blood connection with the father. Although a child is also considered to be connected to mother and the mother's kin by blood connection, it seems social relatedness and interaction have always been given the more weight in these relations (e.g. Kapadia 1996, 26-29). The idea that bonds based on social connections and transactions may become more significant markers of relatedness than biological bonds, blood bonds is also a challenge to prevailing concept of patrilineal kinship.

Finally, it seems as if the children could not fully belong to the two houses and two families. They either became "a continuation" of their mother or father; and either part of their mother's or of father's house. In other words, belonging to two houses felt like belonging nowhere. This is analogous to the Indian women who have two homes but yet (perhaps) no home of their own, as presented earlier (see Chapter 6). However, the divorced and separated women who had lost both of these houses were able to reconstruct – through their ways of homemaking – a third home which they could even consider as their "own" while they living with the children. The foundations of these "own houses" were vulnerable, which made the importance of constant homemaking become more

crucial. It strengthened the bonds between the members of the house as well as held them together, even though there was no guarantee that things would continue. In a way, these houses as well as the bonds between the mother and children remained on alert – on any day things could be questioned by the husband and his family. Thus, even if these houses were considered as the women's "own", they – or the members of the household – could never be isolated from their surroundings, history, other bonds and other houses. They – as Indian persons – are "related" by their elementary existence. They are "incomplete", in a flux state of becoming, developing and expanding; and their 'fluid' and 'permeable' qualities facilitate their transformations through transactions.

Chapter 8 looks at the houses of the last third of the divorced and separated women who were living alone. I will look at how the single living women constructed their "third home" through their kind of homemaking in the absence of other family members who, in the earlier Chapters, have played in a key role regarding the women's homemaking. I will look at whether their homemaking, their bonds reaching out of the conventional web of kinship and the complexity of their relatedness may question the existing social order of gender and kinship hierarchies and further widen – or challenge – our understanding of kinship in general. Finally, I will examine what all this means with regard to divorced and separated women's self-representations and self-constructions as relational persons and in relation to the concept of personhood in South India.

8. LIVING ALONE

Single-Handedly Making a Home

"Fighting Against Loneliness"

There is a small notebook hanging on Savitri's door, next to the doorbell: if she is not at home, a guest can write a message there for her. Today Savitri is at home because we have an appointment. We have known each other for months, since I first attended a meeting of the group of single living women. Savitri is the founder and one of the leading members of this self-help group of approximately twenty women – singles over thirty, divorcees, widows – that meets regularly in Bangalore: sometimes privately in *"home meetings"* and also sometimes by inviting guest speakers and opening meetings to the public. I first met them at public meeting. The group was established two years ago as a result of the workshop organized by another association. The idea of the workshop was to find out how single women coped with their everyday lives and problems. Consequently, these women ended up establishing themselves as a group in order to cope better.

Now Savitri finally has time to meet me during the daytime – in the evenings she is forever busy – because she has become one of the *"so-called unemployed"* as she laughingly announced. Savitri lives alone and so her home would be a peaceful place to talk in private. It is easy to find as it situated in the central area of Bangalore. Savitri's mother's maid is vacuuming the house today and she wants to keep an eye on her, Savitri justifies her choice of our meeting place. Savitri's tiptop-clean, beautiful house is full of works of art: antique pieces, religious statues and miniature paintings. Moreover, one full room is dedicated to music: there are plenty of CDs and records, big loudspeakers and the instruments of clas-

sical Indian music such as a *tabla,* a *sitra* and miniature *vina.* Sometimes Savitri sings in the music room. She takes singing lessons and, for her, singing is also therapeutic – it *"heals"* her. Savitri prefers North Indian classic music, maybe because her roots are there, although she otherwise feels more home in South India, especially in Bangalore. She could not imagine living anywhere else: her social circle is here, she has learned to live and move independently here. Moreover, she likes her house, it is old and it has plenty of room. Earlier, her parents and siblings used to live there and her father still pays the rent; and the water and electricity bills. From time to time, Savitri invites her single friends – as well as other friends – home, last time they had *Diwali*-party together. Moreover, once a year she organizes a musical event at home where her tabla-teacher – her "*guru"* – as well as her and other students play for their friends. At the moment, Savitri is planning how she could use the extra room of the house for her new work, however, neither the plan nor work has yet materialised.

We are sitting in a cosy sofa in the hall of the house. I am recording our interview and Savitri tells me about her life analytically and in detail. Savitri sits near to the phone table and whenever the phone rings she answers immediately. *"This is my lifeline!"* she excuses herself with a smile. After a call from her friend she stumbles accidentally with the phone wire and it gets separated from the wall connection. For a short while, displeased, Savitri thinks over the situation: she does not know how to fix the connection. Then she runs to her neighbour to make a phone call and soon afterwards the doorbell rings. An old friend of Savitri, in his lawyer's suit, enters the house. Savitri brings him a big toolbox and he starts to fix her phone. Meanwhile, they talk about their amazing telepathic connection – they use to think of each other exactly the same time and yesterday it had also happened. Savitri had wanted to talk to the friend about her sister's illness: her cancer had recurred and she was admitted to the hospital in Bangalore. After a while, Savitri asks me to continue with my questions, despite their private and personal nature. *"He is like a brother to me. He already knows all my problems,"* Savitri explains to me. After an hour, the friend gives up but takes the telephone with him. Because of Savitri's sister's situation, the telephone is now even more important than ever, thus, the friend assures Savitri that the phone will be back in working by the evening and Savitri can then fetch it from his office. After the friend leaves, I sincerely wonder how on earth the

problem could be solved so smoothly and what a helpful friend she has. *"I have also other friends like him. Otherwise life is too difficult,"* Savitri replies.

Lunch time is approaching and Savitri suggests that we order food from the home delivery service of a nearby restaurant so that we save time and we can eat and talk at the same time. Soon the door bell rings and we peel open packets of the delicious smelling food, vegetarian gravies, curries of *palak paneer* and *gobi Manchurian*, *black dahl* –sauce and special bread of *kulcha* and handkerchief-*roties*. When Savitri then brings a thick fresh *curd* [like yogurt], and a spice sour pickle made by herself from the fridge we have a tasty meal. Again, I am surprised how smoothly she organizes everything. *"You learn to do these things when you are single"*, she replies contentedly.

We continue with the interview. The more Savitri talks about the problems of her marriage and break up, the more distressed, tired and small she appears. Finally, she is too exhausted to continue. In any event, we are running out of time, even though Savitri has already skipped her computer-class. Soon Savitri has an appointment with her friend whom she is taking to meet a lawyer and so Savitri wants us to continue the interview tomorrow as she feels it is important to describe everything – both the problems and recovering from them – in detail. Now she needs something to cheer her up before meeting her friend. I follow her into the kitchen as she has *"no objections to it"* – she is not afraid of contamination. While making us ginger tea, she talks again about how she *"changed herself"* in order to live more comfortably**.** As she *"fights against loneliness"*, she makes friends with all kinds of people and not only with those of her *"standard"* or her *"class"* as she once used to do, before her personal "change". Moreover, she could not have asked a man to come to fix her telephone if she still though too much about *"what other people think"*. Savitri emphasizes that she, although divorced, wants to live *"a full comfortable life"* not a *"substitute life, made up of compromises"*. Thus, she is searching for a well-paid job. *"I am not going to give up",* she says determinedly but smiling. The next morning we meet again and finally finish the longest life history interview I have ever conducted – it lasts for more than seven hours. This time we are very conscious about the shortage of time – Savitri is going to meet her mother at lunch time and then they are going together to the hospital to meet Savitri's sister. Only twice our conversation is interrupted – the telephone is working again.

An ambiguous and alien state is to live alone in India where homes are considered to be the main venues for personal transactions and where no one – and particularly no woman – should live alone, as described earlier in this study. Most of the single divorced and separated women that live alone (16 out of 53, see appendix 1 for details) were educated, middle or upper class women having a regular job.[256] Like Savitri, many were afraid of loneliness or considered themselves to be lonely. As Daniel (1984, 110) states when describing Tamils in interpersonal relations, people feel cosy and comfortable when in crowds and one of the things they fear is that of being alone. An ill person especially must not be left alone to suffer loneliness in addition to illness. The ultimate fear and humiliation is having to die alone (ibid). The loneliness of the divorced and separated women living alone materialized when they needed help – if they were sick or if they had met with an accident or other misfortune – there was no one at home to help them. Some women did not feel their homes were safe because of this loneliness. As the cultural concept of house bonds a woman with other people, first in her natal home and then in her affinal home, a woman living alone is as an easy target of gossip by other people – colleagues, neighbours, landlords, friends, friends of friends; and strangers.

Threat of loneliness often emerged as a feeling of financial insecurity although the most of the divorced and separated women living alone had a regular paid job. Their self-sufficiency manifested their bondlessness – they did not have any culturally and socially defined supporter such as a husband to a wife, a father to an unmarried daughter or a son to a mother if they met with unpredictable misfortune, particularly unemployment or illness. Thus, they were saving and money was constantly talked about. The women who had faced the periods of severe financial insecurity highlighted the significance of money as a practical and emotional security issue whereas the women who had wealthier family backgrounds or who had become wealthy thanks to their career needed money for their *"standard of living"*: nice housing, beautiful clothes, their own vehicle or transport, servants, laundry services, special food, nice hobbies and for going out.

[256] Exceptions to this: Latha was a lower class, uneducated woman, Pushpa and Tarak were not educated, Pushpa and Savitri did not have salaried jobs, Anita had a poor girl living with her.

As transactions of food – the cooking and eating of food – are profoundly social and family-based activities in India, eating alone heightened. To avoid eating alone, some women used to eat out with their colleagues or their friends or would buy a take-way meal from a restaurant and eat at home simply to feel full or when there were guests to eat with. In the following section, I look at how the divorced and separated women that live alone struggled against loneliness by connecting their homes and enlarging their networks of social and familial relations into multiple directions.

Connecting Homes

Instead of concentrating on homemaking on behalf of the family inside of home (cf. Chapter 6 and 7), the divorced and separated women living alone connected their homes to the outside world either directly through the telephone, internet, or e-mail; or indirectly by watching television or by reading women's magazines, newspapers, Indian and foreign novels, non-fiction, philosophical or religious literature; or by keeping a diary, or writing articles or novels, or by studying, for example, on computer courses or the psychologically oriented studies of counselling or self-improvement. If compared with the homes of other divorced and separated women who were living with their other family members, the homes of the divorced and separated women living alone appeared to have more furniture and were more "personalized" and decorated according to the women's own tastes, preserving items or memories of women's history and showing photos important to them. Those divorced and separated women living alone who had children preserved the image and memory of them in photos.

Only in a couple of cases did the children of these women visit their homes. More often, the mothers secretly visited the children at school and gave them small gifts and sweets (see Chapter 7). The fathers were the gatekeepers of the phone but one woman was thrilled to realise that she could directly communicate with her children via e-mail thanks to a computer she bought for her home. Often framed photos of the children were placed in the central place of the house: in the showcase or on the television set[257]. These photos can be interpreted as being analogous to

[257] Exception were a woman who did not want to reveal her neighbours that she had a child and a woman who did not keep a contact with her children (see earlier).

the portrait photographs of deceased loved ones that hung in houses: they manifest the special bond between the person in the photo and the person who had hang them on her wall. According to Mines (1994, 10), these portraits reflect and symbolise the significance of a uniqueness defined by relationship – and the individual always exists in relation to others and derives distinctiveness from these relationships in South India. One woman had placed the gifts from her children – a coffee mug with a "Great mom" label and photo frames with the text about a wonderful, warm hearted mother – side by side with her children's photos.

Furthermore, a few women, who missed their children or who felt sorry that they had no children, opened their homes to the children of others'. Anita[258] had terminated her pregnancy because of pressure from her ex-husband. Today she regretted it deeply. However, she informally "adopted" herself a "daughter". This girl used to live in a slum nearby, in a poor family of many children. Now the girl practically lived with Anita – she slept, ate, did her school work and helped Anita with light household tasks – but she also daily went to her "real home" where she was needed to take care of her younger sisters. Anita used to also invite other poor children to eat with them whenever they turned up at the kitchen door while they were eating. In fact, a few other women had also made serious plans to adopt themselves a daughter. Alternatively, some women used to have the children of their sisters as their regular company and as daily visitors to their homes. Furthermore, one woman, Debi[259], whose own children lived far way with their father, took in paying guests – young working women, two at time, whom she considered as her "*little sisters".* To this day she has had twelve such paying guests**.** *"Once you had got used to live others; your family and children; you do not want to be alone anymore,"* she reasoned. In addition to the paying guests, Debi's friend's daughter used Debi's sewing machine and went at training from Debi's house regularly. Additionally, one woman made up *"a maturing daughter"* she claimed to others to be living in another town together with her "husband", also made up.

Work acted as a substitute for the feeling of deprivation of homely interactions. At work, the single living women became a part of their working community in which they associated or made friends with the people of similar educational and social backgrounds. Moreover, it gave the

[258] C/H, 43, h, d/j-, 0c

[259] C, 46, u, s/j, 2c.

single living women a professional identity and position which softened their position as a divorced woman or could "explain" their "singleness" in the eyes of the curious others. At best, they felt themselves irreplaceable. Furthermore, the hobbies and volunteer work of these women living alone also connected them with the other people socially and in a personally significant way: they did social work, they participated in self-development or professional courses or hobbies (e.g. counselling workshops, computer courses, English lessons, further education, yoga and music lessons) and/or they participated in religious activities. These divorced and separated women living alone each connected their home and work in a way that enlarged their social connectedness and interaction with other people. Nirmala's[260] job of transferring housing was provided by her employer, a bank, and it provided her every third or fourth year with a new placement near to other employees or customers, for example, into the campus of a rural women's development program she was managing when I met her. Tarek[261], both a cook and a ward, lived in the hostels where she worked. In their homes, some women were doing medical transcriptions for multinational companies via their internet connection and others were involved with different kinds of network-businesses that were arriving in Bangalore. Gita and Manika connected work and home by merging the spheres of the public (work) and private (home). As they did this, they created new bonds and strengthened their old bonds.

According to Gita, she established her own office, "Gita & Associates" three years ago after getting deeply involved with a self-improvement program. She too decided to *"take charge of my own life instead of paying too much attention to what others might think about me."* She won over her fear of combining work and the home which had been initiated by her experience with her male friends who had begun to *"act in a funny way,"* pushing themselves into her home after the marital breakdown. Now Gita had a home/office that contained her own office room, the hall which was both the public office room of *"Gita's team",* i.e., her two female employees, as well as Gita's own private living room. Gita's bedroom and kitchen were out of sight of the office. When I met Gita in her home/office, she was there alone because yesterday one of her employees had broken her leg and the whole team was at the hospital in support. Today Gita took care of the office routines and her other employee was

[260] H, 43, u, d/j, 0c /1996 + H, 47, u, d/j, 0c /2000.
[261] H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c.

handling some matters in town. Over three years Gita's firm had stabilized its finances and created a circle of permanent clients. It had teamed up with two other accountancy firms: they exchanged clients, helped each other for free and had each specialized in certain sectors, thus, together they had wide expertise to offer. Furthermore, the combination of work and home had proved to be a safe solution: Gita's clients had treated her with professional respect and, in addition, even if her working day lengthened, she was already at home when it ended. Consequently, Gita also started to blend her hobbies and activities together with her work as well as to mix her network of different components in her life. Sometimes she wrote her novel during business hours and she did not hesitate to promote the program of one of her activities to the members of her other activity groups or to her family members, friends or colleagues.

Manika[262] connected her work and home by turning her workplace, a small computer centre, into her additional or "transitional home", as I would call it. I always met Manika first in the computer centre because it remained there although Manika's own residency kept on changing. I would also call there if I needed to reach her. At the entrance to the computer centre was a sign that requested people to take off their shoes (in order to respect Saraswathi, the goddess of education) – like one does when entering someone's home in India. There I also met Manika's natal family members as well as her future, affinal family members. Manika and her husband-to-be, Sachin, had kept their regular jobs but the rest of the time they spent in the computer centre. Thus, it was their meeting and mediating place between their homes – Manika's rented, simple, single one-room residence and Sachin's expensive house occupied by his family of mother, father and sister into which Manika would move after the marriage. In the computer centre Sachin's Brahmin, Kannadiga family and Manika's Vishwakarma (traditionally caste of goldsmiths), Tamil family had learnt to accept each other and the future alliance. Manika's sister's family, along with Manika's mother, had moved to a residence next door to the computer centre. While Manika and Sachin were working elsewhere, Manika's sister took care of the centre and Manika's mother took care of the sisters' two children who were also regular and welcome visitors of the centre. Furthermore, Sachin's sister spent her evenings in the centre taking part in the computer lessons of Manika.

[262] H, 31, m, d/l, 0c.

Like in homes, there were photo albums to look at – they were filled with the photos of the ritual *Ayudha puja* performed yearly at the centre. Only the daily transactions regarding food which make homes were usually missing, however, even they took place after the ritual of *Ayudha puja.* Once a year the families met in the *Ayudha puja* of the centre which is done for tools, i.e., computers in this case, in order to bless them and to dispossess them of evil spirits. In *Ayudha puja*, Manika acted as the hostess serving food and taking care of the guests and Sachin acted as the host who welcomed guests and oversaw the performance of the ritual. Their families shared responsibilities in a complementary manner: Manika, her sister and mother took care of preparing and serving food and coffee whereas Sachin, his sister, his mother and father took care of the ritual responsibilities, such as appointing and assisting a priest; and witnessing and documenting the ritual. This ritual as well as the everyday practices of the computer centre were increasing transactions and the sharing of Manika's and Sachin's families – binding them into the same family and, perhaps, evening up the differences between them. Both Gita's as well as Manika's ways of combining work and home – work at home and home at work – became their form of homemaking which connected them as well as their homes to other people – to their workmates or partners and clients, which particularly in Manika's case included also her family members or family members-to-be.

Instead of focusing on homemaking for the family inside their home which was not possible, the divorced and separated women's that live alone found that most important form of homemaking was to connect their homes and lives to other people outside their homes, by maintaining their old bonds – particularly to their children and natal family members and friends – and by creating new bonds – particularly through work and different associations and networks, as I will describe later in this chapter. In the homes described earlier, the natal family members (Chapter 6) or the children (Chapter 7) were keeping the divorced or separated women busy *in* their homes. As single women missed them so ***"I** am keeping myself busy"* was considered to be the best medicine against loneliness. Their forms of homemaking tied them a web of significant relations in the absence of them at home. These women's carried their homely transactions of eating and intimate sharing along with them outside their homes or they welcomed others into their homes – they invited friends leniently, beyond caste/class or gender borders, organised

meetings, "adopted" daughters, took in paying guests etc. Thus, the more personal or closed "third homes" of divorced and separated women who lived alone, were *also* "relational" or "related" to others and opened up in novel ways. Consequently, "third homes" of these women challenged the contemporary gender and kinship ideologies that bond a woman's home position to that of other family members, and particularly to the male family members of the house.

These divorced and separated women considered their "third homes" as their "own" in regard to the fact that they had control over the access to it and their own room in which to develop themselves and to maintain their contacts and relatedness. Nevertheless, the homes were usually considered as temporary – their eventual houses were yet to be constructed or bought after they had improved their finances or they had found a new partner. Moreover, the women's fight against the loneliness and emptiness of their "own house" raises the question of whether an Indian woman even wants to have a home of her own. The house needs to be connected with other people in order to "feel like home", similarly, the women need to be bonded with other people in order to "be a person". In what following sections, I will look at how those relationships based on familial sharing and reciprocity inside of the home that usually "makes a home" were replaced by the relationships based on a new kind of sharing and reciprocity, i.e. the sharing of experiences and the reciprocity of help, both practical and emotional, both inside and outside the home. The divorced and separated women who live alone created and maintained deeply significant bonds beyond their homes and, also, beyond the conventional web of kinship, particularly with the other women having a similar kind of life situation. While looking at these connections and bonds – how were they made and remade through interaction and sharing, as well as their actual significance – we may need to look for novel ways to explore relatedness– could these significant relations beyond kinship also question our conventional ways of considering kinship?

Expanding Relatedness through Reciprocity

Kinship, Friendship, Relatedness

The recent studies of kinship, inspired by Schneider (1968; 1972; 1984), use the term "relatedness" instead of kinship in order to signal their open-

ness to indigenous idioms of being related (see Carsten 2000, ed.).[263] While describing relatedness in the terms of indigenous statements and practices, some of them way seem to fall quite outside what anthropologist have conventionally understood as kinship (Carsten 2000, 3; Lambert 2000; Stafford 2000; Bodenhorn 2000; Edwards and Strathern 2000; Hutchinson 2000; Middleton 2000).

In an Indian context, kinship as described by anthropologists has usually been taken to comprise those relations produced by birth (descent) and by marriage (affinity). According to Lambert (2000, 88-89) as such it can only characterise a very confined sphere of social relations while excluding most of everyday life that occurs beyond these groups. Moreover, according to Lambert (2000, 73) the existence of caste and its endogamous character has produced difficulties in thinking comparatively about Indian kinship because kinship has been taken as subordinate to, and discrete from, caste (ibid, 73).[264] On the basis of her study on locally recognized forms of relatedness of shared locality, adoption and nurturance, Lambert (2000, 74, 88-89) suggests, that it is worth looking at more processual ways in which people can modify and extend the more limited set of relations that are generally regarded as immutable.

Fruzzetti (2006, 3-4) points out that, in Bengal, *attiyas* are especially those relatives defined through blood and by marriage. However, the concept of an *attiya* is relative; relationships can also be established through a code of conduct outside the boundaries of marriage and blood connectedness, e.g., by the sharing of living space in a locality, living in the same village, working together in an office, sharing membership in a church etc. (ibid.). According to Fruzzetti (ibid., 4), the code of conduct designates the kinship mode and configuration to set boundaries or ties, with all of those people one chooses to call *attiya* (ibid.). Thus, the principle of hierarchy in Indian society explaining vertical relations among units is complemented by an equivalence within each unit (see Östör et al. 1992a; 1992b).

[263] Carsten (2000, 5) also acknowledge the problems with the term "relatedness": either it is used in a restricted sense to convey relations in some way founded on genealogical connection, in which case it is open to similar problems as kinship, or it is used in a more general sense to encompass other kind of social relations, in which case it becomes to broad that it is in danger of becoming analytically vacuous.

[264] This with the exception of Fruzzetti, Östör & Barnett (1992, 6) who have asserted that formal analysis of kinship obscure "the significance of indigenous categories that crosscut the boundaries of kinship and caste" (Lambert 2000, 74).

Friendship also forms relatedness although it has attracted scant ethnographic attention compared to kinship in India (Säävälä 2005, 1). Säävälä (2005, 4) points out in her study of friendship in Andhra Pradesh that as analytical categories, friendship and kinship are mutually reinforcing and defining forms of social relatedness that are difficult to categorically differentiate, particularly when the symbolism of kin, manifested for example in term of address, is so pervasive. Moreover, kin relations are the core symbols of personhood and affect the way social relatedness in all its forms is understood. People who are related are thought to share bio-moral substance: an essence that is physical in nature but also affects moral propensities (Marriott 1976; Daniel 1984). A fluid personhood may transform through transactions with surrounding people, food and actions, etc. (ibid.). Those who are in close interaction, such as friends, are also thought to influence each other's substance through habituation: by spending time with them and by being familiar or intimate with them (Trawick 1996, 99). "When you had *parakkam* (Tamil: habit) with a person, just as when you had *parakkam* with a substance, that person became part of your system (ibid.)."

According to Säävälä (2005, 6) this means that Indian kinship and friendship cannot be separated as realms by *universalizing* definitions, yet, the idea of friendship and amity (*sneeham* in Telegu) and a friend is a conceptually and pragmatically separated, demarcated social category from kin relations among the Telegu. Säävälä points out that although in India, friends as well as relatives may share substance, there is nevertheless a difference based on the temporal role of shared substance: relative are by definition those who share substance or those who cannot share it, while friends may come to share substance though their intensive interaction, in eating, in sharing spaces and in touching (ibid., 2005, 4). Thus, the demarcating feature is the voluntary and negotiable nature of friendship as a form of sharing substance, vis-a-vis the definite role of substance-sharing in kin relations (Säävälä 2005, 6). A relative cannot become a non-relative, no matter whether interaction takes place or not, while a friend stays a friend only through the medium of interaction. Moreover, friends are chosen on the basis of certain similarity based on other considerations than hierarchical deference – egalitarian friendship offers the arena of alternative ways of socializing (Säävälä 2005, 15-16; see also Osella & Osella 1998; Osella & Osella 2000, 228-231).

In the following sections, I will explore the significant relationships and bonds based on the interaction and substantial transactions of the single living divorced and separated women both inside and outside their homes. I will use the term "relatedness" to indicate these relationships alongside kinship and friendship. What kind of relatedness do they form and indicate? Do these women's relationships, bonds and relatedness question or broaden or our view to consider kinship or friendship? Finally, I will look at how all this describes the divorced and separated women's self-representations and self-constructions as relational persons and the concept of personhood in South India.

Mutual Support of Single Women

The divorced and separated women living alone were active in maintaining their old, important bonds, as mentioned earlier. A few women had good long-standing friends that they had known even before they got married. As they knew each other so well and their bond was based on mutual trust and sharing – not on blood – the women felt that they could talk more freely and without guilt with these friends about their divorce than, for example, with their sisters. The friends considered the situation first and foremost from the woman's point of view: what is best for her, not for her family or other kin people. Moreover, as the shame of the divorce did not affect a friend's honour as it did that of family members, the friend could more easily support the woman throughout her court process and crises. Correspondingly, the women were also more easily available to help when their friends needed them. These kinds of friends were important but, however, fairly exceptional.

Instead, the divorced and separated living alone women created new – and deeply significant – bonds with the other women living a similar kind of life situation. These bonds connected women to networks of mutual support and reciprocity which, at best, helped them to overcome or ease the problems caused by living alone. The single women's group that Savitri (above) belonged to had regular, scheduled meetings. In addition, some of the members got together whenever anyone had the need for it, for example, when one woman moved, the others helped her with packing and delivering her things, and when another woman was admitted to hospital, the others visited her, taking it in turns, so that she had a visitor every day, and when a third woman was looking for a site to buy, she had someone to accompany for her on journeys to her destination. As part of

this group, a single woman could also call on others if she was sick and needed someone to bring her medicine or food or, simply, if she wanted company to see a particular movie or to visit a new restaurant. All the single women each considered festival time difficult to bear without their own family to celebrate it with. Outside the home this represents a time in which society reiterates familial bonds and kinship ties to acknowledge their anomalous position (cf. Fruzzetti 2006, 12-13).[265] Thus, these women celebrated religious festivals together and across the religious boundaries – Christian and Muslim group-members also joined Savitri's *diwali* parties and, for example, one Muslim and one Christian woman spent all their religious festivals – both Muslim and Christian – together. The members of the group of single women rejoiced that in such a group *"we can be ourselves and do not feel inferior"*. Thus, they could act and be "*contextualized individuals"* as elaborated on by Mines (1994, 21) about the Tamils of South India. By the term "contextualized individuals" Mines means that the individuality of persons is recognised within the context of groups where they are known and within which they have a known set of statuses and roles. Contexts include the household, one's kin, and one's caste community, but they may also include the neighbourhood, political parties or other institutions, such as, I would suggest, a single women's network. These are all contexts within which who a person is (e.g., one's character, behaviour, caste, gender, name, locality identity, offices, roles) will be judged and valued (ibid.).

Some members of the group emphasised the practical support and the instrumental nature of the group whereas others talked more about its emotional significance. Presumably, the former women wanted their need of a support group to be temporary as they would prefer to remarry whereas the latter had adjusted to the idea of remaining single. As a matter of fact, the temporary nature of the group membership was manifested by the farewell party the group organized for one of its oldest members who moved away, as well as by the "thank you party" one member organized for the group after she went back to her husband. Thus, this "context" could be terminated or replaced. On the other hand, over the years, some of the women had become good personal friends who visited each other regularly and, for example, celebrated their birthdays

[265] Similarly Fruzzetti (2006, 12-3) describes how tensions and depression within the "homes" of orphaned girls increased during the festivals while homeless girls acknowledge their anomalous position without a family.

together. Thus, the transactions of practical help turned into the transactions of friendships that created an effective bond between the women and increased their transactions of all kinds – everyday and domestic transactions, emotional transactions, festive transactions etc. – and, thus, mixing and sharing of the "substances" of their fluid personalities over the years.

The single divorced and separated women of one organisation or network were also active in other forums and networks and they also mixed these networks and, thus, made them bigger. For example, Debi[266] had a regular job as medical transcriptionist, kept paying guests, was an active member and organiser of formal and informal activities for the single women, worked for three hours every week in the hospital, voluntarily with another association, participated in a counselling course in order to learn to better deal with the people having mental crises, attended monthly free lectures organized by the association she voluntarily worked for, represented her brother, who was the owner of her apartment, in the meetings of housing company, was an active member and regular visitor of *"her church"*, gave lectures in the nurses' training institute and – recently took a new part time job as she still had some spare time. Also other women became volunteer workers for other kinds of charitable organisations. There they did not necessarily create contacts with divorced or separated women, however, they met and helped people who suffered from other kinds of problems as well as other volunteer workers who were inspired by their own life experiences and, usually the hardship they had gone through. In addition to non-profit networks or organisations, one woman, Sulabha[267] joined a commercial association that organises parties for single people. In the parties these well-to-do singles, divorcees and widows could meet each others in a nice atmosphere and safe surroundings – they were even dropped to their frontdoor by the organiser when the parties were over.

Furthermore, the single divorced and separated women created bonds that constituted informal networks and circles of friends who helped each other. Savitri (above) got her telephone fixed by her lawyer friend and then she introduced that lawyer to another friend who needed a good lawyer – they all helped each other and were in turn helped. Also elsewhere, systems of "circulating help" have been noted as a crucial element

[266] C, 46, u, s/j, 2c.
[267] H, 31, u, s/u, 1c /1996.

in the building up of relatedness between those who are *not* related by kinship (e.g. Stack 1974; White 1994). For example in China, Stafford (2000, 38, 47) explores "the cycle of *laiwang"* – reciprocal movement back and forth between people – friends, neighbours, and acquaintances – who have a relationship of mutual assistance in addition to "the cycle of *yang*" which centres mostly on parent-child relationships. According to Stafford (2000, 52-53), the partilineal ideologies, however powerful, are forced to compete in crowded fields of ideas about the ways in which relatedness is produced. In comparison to them, the cycles of *yang* and *laiwang* are rather homely folk models of Chinese relatedness and ones in which kinship and friendship are seen to be hard work and the product of everyday interaction (ibid., 52-53).

In general, the relatedness of the single women's self-help group and networks is based on achieved relations derived from a certain similarity (upper middle class), the hard work of reciprocity and equality despite diversity (varied caste and religious backgrounds, different reasons for being single). Some of these women address one another as "friends" whereas the others talk about *"the members of our group"*. The relatedness of the single women is both spontaneous and anti-hierarchical (the self-help of equal but anomalous status women) as well as structured and hierarchical (scheduled meetings, un-spoken hierarchies based on the length of membership, the role in the group, popularity etc.) or on mixed elements (informal but scheduled home meetings). Within the structural framework, more spontaneous personal friendships emerge simultaneously. The structure gave stability to the group, even though, the members could terminate their membership easily. On the other hand, the whole existence of the group depends on the interest and needs of its members to interact. This relatedness is additional to the kin relations and these women do not make comparisons between them.

Next I will explore further the "hard work" of producing and maintaining relationships by looking at how one woman, Sheela, maintained her wide network.

Smart Lunches: Mastering Networks

I was impressed to observe how smoothly Sheela[268] maintained her wide network of friends and acquaintances, which mostly consisted of di-

[268] C, 54, m, d, 1c.

vorced and separated women but also other Christian women of wealthier and more *"cultured"* backgrounds. Although she lived in the same house as her adult daughter, their homely interaction was intermittent. Therefore I include Sheela here into my analyses of single women as her lifestyle and practical everyday situation – the daughter was away most of the time and they did not usually eat together – was close to that of the divorced and separated women living alone.

Although Sheela struggled to fulfil her main home-based responsibility of taking care of the water delivery, she would never sacrifice her evenings to do it – being home the whole day long would *"drive her crazy"*. Without regular income Sheela was always short of money and, yet, she often managed to eat and live in a comfortable way. For example, she still used a laundry service instead washing her clothes, took *"autos"*, i.e. motor rickshaws, instead of using public transport, went to expensive supermarkets and bakeries instead of the local shops. Her relatively wealthy friends invited her for lunches and dinners to nice restaurants or to their homes. At times when her daughter did not give her any money for food, she knew she could always have a dinner at her friend's house. Sheela also took part in different cultural and social programs – from ballet and German theatre plays to Marriage in Canon law seminars – as well as shopping tours with her friends. Gradually I realized that she was a popular visitor and a welcome guest of women's organisations meetings and seminars and also to private ones that I was not allowed to attend as well as being a good personal friend of many workers of organisations and research institutions, particularly of persons in charge. Once when I expressed admiration for Sheela's active week program, she confessed with smile that even some of friends are a *"bit jealous"* of her lifestyle without any real work but with a lot of freetime activities.

I suggest that Sheela's popularity among her friends was based on her success at mastering reciprocity in her relationships. She had a nice early afternoon and lunch in the women's organisation and also took part in a demonstration they had organized after it. Her friends treated her nicely in the restaurants after ballets, modern dance performances and theatre plays but it was Sheela who had queued up to get their free tickets from the Alliance Francais for the French cultural program or from the Max Muller Bhavan for the German cultural weeks. For a month, Sheela dined regularly at her friend's house, kept her things there and stayed overnight whenever she had disagreements with her daughter but at the

same time she was always good company and an active listener to her and to her children who were in the middle of family crises. Whenever Sheela visited me, she also visited at least some of her other friends living nearby – her separated surgeon friend, her friends in the women's organisation or her *"auntie"* from Kerala – and was hosted generously by them. Similarly, she connected her other programs with the meetings of her friends in the other parts of Bangalore. In fact, she spent less time and knew less people in her own local area, an area she disliked as it was a lower middle class area. She had even arranged herself a post box address in the City area that she preferred and where some of her good, wealthy and cultured friends lived. She gave this postal address wherever her address was asked. However, she did have plans to become active in the local Pentecostal church where she could learn to know "*the cultured people living nearby*" in case she ever needed some help related to her house. Moreover, Sheela was regularly in contact with her friends by phone despite her daughter's growing irritation about the telephone bill she paid. Through her networks Sheela knew what was going on in the City and with the people she considered important. She mediated accommodation among them and helped them to find reliable servants or reasonable services etc. through her connections.

Furthermore, she was an experienced adviser if her divorced and separated friend needed practical or emotional support. Generously Sheela gave all the documents of her well-publicised court case for the use of the women's organisations, research institutes and scholars that she trusted, including me (see Chapter 5). Gradually, I also became a part of her vital network of reciprocal transactions and interaction – she was not only an ideal informant who described and analysed her own case and life in much detail but she also introduced me to some of her separated friends. Reciprocally, through me she knew what was going on in different organisation and institutions and maintained her contact with them. I was her emphatic listener who found myself bringing her Finnish chocolate and inviting her for *"a smart lunch"* in a European restaurant in which *she* would have liked to invite me because she knew I would love it.

Sheela was good at receiving – Sheela used to describe in detail, with an enthusiastic and grateful tone, what she had eaten and drunk with whom and she openly showed her gratitude and joy over whatever she got. However, she also gave generously, as I suggest, parts of her "fluid personality" through transactions: her time and empathy, her "social ca-

pacity" and skills, her life history, her documents, even her wide network for the use of the others she trusted and she whom she wanted to encompass into her network and to be "related" to. All in all, thanks to the reciprocity and due to the transactions of eating, talking, the sharing of time and life experiences, taking part together in cultural and social activities etc. Sheela's bonds with her friends were strong and vital and all benefited in different ways. The friends and the activities with friends filled Sheela's life and emotional and practical needs of being related. In fact, Sheela had more interactions with her friends than she had with her daughter with whom she was living, not to mention her siblings who lived in United States or in Mumbai or her widow mother far away. Some of her wealthy cousins gave her money every now and then but she could only consistently count on her friends: *"I thank God that I have such good friends. That is the only thing that kept me going."* Despite the importance of friends, Sheela never spoke about them with the language of kinship. On the contrary, she made the distinction between her friends she could rely on *instead* of her family and kin that had let her down time after time. It is noteworthy that expectations towards real kin are much higher (see Chapters 6-7), and thus, if a wealthy sister or brother, her own daughter, or a close aunty or cousin gave Sheela money it was considered as natural (or usually less than she had expected) whereas whatever her friends gave her was considered beyond any expectation and therefore something special.

It appears that the relatedness taking form in Sheela's network of divorced and separated friends is derived from achieved relations based on a certain similarity (divorce/separation, upper middle class, cultural background, Christianity), and also the hard work of reciprocity and equality despite diversity (varied material and immaterial resources). However, due to Sheela's and her friends' regular interaction and sharing (e.g. eating together) the bonds between friends became more stable although their meetings still remained spontaneous. The relatedness of Sheela and her friends is additional to her real kin relations – she emphasises the importance of her friends by contrasting them with her real kin. On the other hand, in the women's organisation the idioms of kinship *were* used by the women who – similarly – were disappointed by their real kin, as I will next illustrate. In the women's organisation, the borders between the women's organisation and the home were blurred as well as those borders between the women's organisation and the family.

Transforming Families in the Women's Organisation

Anthropological studies of "made up" kin relations or families – so call "fictive kinship" in the sense of classical kinship theory[269] – such as Baumann's (1995) study on "cousinhood" among the youth of ethnically plural Southall in London and Weston's (1991) study on "chosen families" of gays and lesbians in San Francisco – re-negotiate the base of the apparently universal distinction between kin relations that are "true" or "real", that is considered as biologically based, and those that are "fictive", those that do not derive from ties of sexual procreation (see Schneider 1984, 171-173). Even more importantly, as Carsten (2004, 144) points out, they show that *merging* rather that distinguishing the "real" and "fictive" is what gives these kinship ties their salience. "Cousinhood" among Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Afro-Caribbean and White youth simultaneously draw on the morality of both kinship and friendship (Baumann 1995, 734). "Chosen families" of gays and lesbian friends rest on permanence as the source, and simultaneously the proof of the authenticity of these ties; permanence must be actively produced over time (Weston 1995, 90-1, 99-102). Moreover, Weston's (1991) study of "chosen families" reveals "blood ties" as temporary and prone in the light of the disruptions to them, and severance of them, as a result of "coming out" and declaring one's homosexuality to their families (ibid., 61-75). Instead, "chosen families" of gay and lesbians are invested with certainty, depth and permanence and spoken about in an idiom of kinship (ibid., 103-136). Weston (1991, 105-106) treats gay kinship ideologies theoretically as historical *transformations* rather than "fictive" derivatives of other sort of kinship relations. To Weston (ibid.), the very concept of a substitute or surrogate family suffers from a functionalism that assumes that people intrinsically *need* families. In the following sections, I will explore how the kinship and family ideologies as well as families were transformed in the women's organisation through interaction and transactions of the divorced and separated women after their *"coming out"* of destructive marriages which too revealed "blood ties" as vulnerable to disruption and severance.

[269] According to Weston (1991, 105-106), the concept of "fictive kinship" lost its credibility with the advent of symbolic anthropology and the realization that all kinships is some sense fictional – that is, meaningfully constituted rather than "out there" in a positivist sense.

A half of the divorced and separated single women (8 of 16) as well as other divorced and separated women (8+21, total 29) were involved in the women's organisations as paid workers (8 of 29) or volunteers, participators or as beneficiaries (21 of 29) of their programs and activities fairly regularly. Next I recall my experience with the women's organisation that I had learnt to know best over the years and in which I met 12 of women in this study. There the women could meet other women in a similar kind of life situation. Their mutual support and interaction continued as long as the women took part in the programs of the organisation. I witnessed how the women were helped over the years and even over generations. All the women I met in this women's organisation each told me their version of their "rites of passage story" which other workers and volunteers of the organisation were supporting through empathetic comments such as *"she suffered so much", "she had become so brave"* etc. In all these stories a timid and weak woman turned brave and strong. The women talked about how they *"came out"* of their marriages. In the women's organisation the women were given practical help. Equally important, there the women were listened to patiently, believed in and accepted. Nobody made them feel guilty. Women got to know their legal rights through the women's organisation – in workshops and by listening to other's experiences – and felt that this knowledge empowered them. Through interaction with other women of the organisation, the divorced or separated women discovered that other women had experienced similar problems. Women who shared a "shameful" background could help one another and were able to lead contented lives. Through interaction and transactions with other divorced and separated women in the formal and informal meetings, gatherings and demonstrations, the divorced or separated women were able compare their situation with the others and to redefine their attitudes to, and definitions of, a woman's value, honour, empowerment, women's rights and family relationships. They shared time and space together, ate together and participated in demonstrations that can be interpreted as a shared ritual or performance of the women organisation.

Over the years, I also witnessed Rathamma's transformation from the one who was helped to the one who helped. Eventually, she was promoted to the hierarchy of the organisation. Now as a paid worker of the organisation she had chances to represent the organisation as well as her own views at the national and even at international conferences in order to promote women's rights. Her knowledge and network of activist women had grown together with their responsibility and loyalty to the

organisation. Now she wanted improve her English – to become a better qualified representative of the organisation – by having English-Kannada -lessons with me. Her previous *"personal challenge"* was already completed. She, already a grandmother had recently learnt to ride a motorcycle in order to increase her mobility, help her to put up with the irregular working hours and to give her the feeling of freedom. In the organisation, she was promoting a plan for a short-stay home to which deserted women could enter with their children, so that others could avoid repeating her own personal misery of losing one's child.

The building of the women's organisation had a "home like" atmosphere – shoes were left at the front entrance, the workers were sitting and chatting on cosy mats and pillows with their visitors or co-workers and lunch was made and served to all present during the lunch hour. The atmosphere of the women's meeting I observed, led by Rathamma (above), was warm, relaxed and informal. *"The workers talk to the women as if they were their family members,"* my research assistant whispered to me. Certainly, the workers own life experiences influenced their attitudes as many of them – from an advocate and social workers to a cook – were themselves divorced or separated.

The workers and volunteer of the women's organisation – including divorced and separated women – regularly left this homely venue in order to address the public, outside the home, in the streets and in other public places that are not conventionally considered as a woman's place (e.g. Bagchi 1995, 7, 9; Bandyopadhyay 1995, 138-139; Mukherjee 1994, 50; Mandelbaum 1987, 133; Desai & Krishnaraj 1990, 282). There they openly resisted social injustices by organizing demonstrations and campaigns. The organisation's demonstrations and networks were channels through which women could make statements or protest at the national and even international level.

Importantly, the women who were estranged from their real families could identify themselves as part of the women's organisation's "family." Women who had lost two families, the natal and the conjugal, felt that they belonged somewhere in the women's organisation. *"This is my new family,"* I was often told. Amrita[270] reported:

> I no longer have a mother or a father, because they did not help me. If I fall sick, I will first call [name of the women's organisation]]. If I have

[270] H, 31, l, s/u, 2c.

> a problem, I will go to [name]. When I arrive, she [staff member] says: 'The daughter of [name] has come.' This is my family. This is my parents' house.

The women called one another by kinship terms such as mother *(amma),* daughter *(maglu*), elder sister *(akka)* and little sister *(tangi).* Different "family relations" were not only based on the women's ages, but also on the relationship between the helper and the helped. In addition to the divorced or separated women, other people have joined the "family" of the women's organisation. I once met a couple whom the organisation had helped when the woman's father and brother had kidnapped her in order to destroy their marriage. They now lived happily together, but they did not maintain ties with the wife's family. The organisation has become the woman's "new parents." *"She is my mother-in-law,"* said the husband about Rathamma (see above). In fact, the name Rath*amma* is itself of comprised a term *amma* (= a mother) and by this name Rath*amma* was called by everyone in the organisation although I later found out that her "real" name is originally without this ending.

Amrita and others who talked about their "*new family"* framed their own categories for a family and framed their own position in it. The ones who were rejected and disowned by their real families, turned into the agents who were declaring it as their own family on the basis of the help and support they had received from it and believe they will receive if needed. However, Amrita needed others to also verify her belonging to the family of the organisation, (*when I arrive, she [staff member] says: 'The daughter of [name] has come.')* This is a contrast to participants of Weston's study who tended to depict their chosen families as thoroughly individualistic affair, insofar as each and every ego was left to be the chooser (ibid., 109). An additional contrast to Weston's chosen families is that there the people placed themselves in the relationship of sisters and brothers to one another, regardless their respective ages whereas in these Indian "chosen" families, the women (and other member of these "families") placed themselves into intergenerational relationships (*the daughter of*, *this is my parents house*, and *mother-in-law*). Thus, the family members of Weston's (ibid., 109, 117) study were pictured as a cluster surrounding a single individual and the characterisation of most ties were closer to peer relationships than the family relations of their previous families whereas the Indian women of this study chose to place themselves into

the hierarchical whole, into the hierarchical relations emulating the hierarchical family relations of their earlier families.

In the context of India, it is not unusual to use kinship terms when addressing friends, especially clearly hierarchically superior ones, by respectful consanguineal kinship terms such as *anna* (elder brother) and *akka* (elder sister). As Säävälä (2005, 4) points out, these are terms of reference that give the relationship an air of affectionate respect and deference. Moreover, the same terms are used tactically whenever one wants to secure a favourable response from anyone who is not hierarchically too distant, a shop vendor for example (ibid.). In another example, Säävälä noted that girls mark a relationship as friendship, not a romance, by categorizing their male friend as an elder brother (*anna*). Likewise Savitri said her lawyer friend, who fixed her phone, was *"like a brother"* to her (see Chapter 8.). Following the same logic, the women of this study categorized themselves as daughters because they wanted to receive parent-kind of care and support from the family of organisation. Thus, for them this "family" was neither as an *extension* of friendship (cf. Weston 1991, 118) nor the embodiment of equal friendship (cf. Säävälä 2005). Belonging to the "family" of the women's organisation gave women the feeling of togetherness, security and relatedness. In the organisation, a woman could also "grow up" from the position of a "daughter" to the position of the "mother" or "mother-in-law" by taking care of others and by carrying out different kinds of responsibilities for others. This at least compensated for the loss of broken family ties [blood and affinal ties] even if it could not replace them – particularly the broken bonds to one's own children. For example, Rathamma – our well-loved and respected *amma* and *atte* of the women's organisation – burst into tears once while showing me an old photo of her real daughter who did not want to have any contact with her (see the previous Chapter) while telling me about the separation with her real son because of her real daughter-in-law: "*I am left all alone. I have lost everybody. I have had to sacrifice too much."*

As a matter of fact, the "family" of the women's organisation co-existed with other alternative transformations of family or family models that were taking place by the women's organisation either intentionally or unintentionally. The women's organisation strongly supported the divorced and separated women in order to get re-united with their children, thus, forming families of single mothers. Through interaction with other divorced

and separated mothers, the women could see some mothers with their children at the organisation and hear how divorced or separated mothers had obtained custody of their children. Thus, the women who on first coming to the organisation saw themselves as failures and wanted to save their children from this fate could now identify themselves with this alternative mother and family model. Through the organisation their sense of honour and self-respect were therefore restored and they were assisted in finding accommodation and employment. They started to fight for the custody of their children thanks to their new-found self-respect and confidence as mothers.

Furthermore, the women's organisation also supported the reunion of the women to their "real" families in different forms and ways. Although the organisation underlined women's autonomy, it also valued families – but conditionally: the families in which the women were valued. An attempt was always first made to reunite the affinal family. The organisation acted as a mediator, a role that only respected people in the family, kin or caste traditionally play. If the reconciliation succeeded, the process prior to it had probably strengthened the woman's position as well as having shaken the positions in, and relationships among, the family members. If the reconciliation failed, the organisation suggested that the woman should return to her natal family, or alternatively, she was helped in creating a new, alternative family of mother and child. Both alternatives confused and modified conventional family models (see Chapters 6 and 7). For example, single motherhood both emphasised the women's (relational) autonomy as well as honoured mandate of motherhood. Moreover, remarriages was not condemned as long as it was not based on the exploitation of the divorced or separated women's vulnerable position. Thus, acceptance of remarriage questioned the sanctity of the first husband and the eternity of the marriage but, on the other hand, a new marriage re-established a woman's wifehood and the control exercised by the new husband. Finally, single divorced and separated women could at least become members of the women's organisation's own "family." Or they could, together with other divorced and separated women, establish a new home, a short stay home for women with their children, as they had planned for the future. With the support of, and as a part of the women's organisation, the single divorced and separated women sought to place themselves into the newly arranged hierarchical family relationships and, thus, encompass themselves into the wholeness of the hierarchical women's organisation, into the "home"

of the women's organisation. Isolated women were striving for the wholeness of (family) hierarchy. Although the chosen relations could not "replace" real family relations identically, at least, they could help compensate for the *loss* of them.

All in all, relatedness in the women's organisation is based on achieved relations on the grounds of a certain similarity (women in trouble / women activist), the hard work of reciprocity and equality despite diversity (varied social status, caste and religious backgrounds). This equally oriented and striving women's organisation has mobilized and organized its resources into the established structure and thus it has already became more stable and hierarchical. Relatedness of the women is, accordingly, partly stabilised in the form of the organisation but the existence of the organisation is not dependent on it (as the single women's network). The hierarchical relations of the women's organisation are based on, firstly, a woman's position as the one who either helped others or was helped by others and, secondly, the women's different work positions and personal histories in the organisation (a volunteer worker, a paid worker having different levels of responsibility, a member of the decision making group, one of the founders of the organisation etc.) Some women in the women's organisation address one another by kinship terms indicating their hierarchical relationship as well as their relationships of help-receivers and help-givers. This indicates the "positive" hierarchical relationship based on care and protection, as it is, ideally, between parents and children. Furthermore, the relatedness of the women in the organisation sometimes replaces missing (hierarchical) family relations as some of these women are concretely rejected by their "real" families and had no contact with them, in comparison to some of the some other single women, and also Sheela, who were selectively in contact with their family members and relatives. Correspondingly, while Sheela presents herself as a "friend", Amrita presents herself as a "daughter" of the women's organisation. Similarly, the relationships emerging in the women's organisation resemble kinship in contrast to Sheela's informal network friends – she as well as many other single separated and divorced women do not need an additional "family" but merely the support in order to cope with their real and problematic family relations.

Conclusion: The Continuum of Relatedness

The relatedness among the divorced and separated women living alone evidently is an on-going process. The women modify and extend the set of important relations beyond that what is conventionally considered as kinship – based on bonds of blood or affinity – as well as what is considered as friendship – based on bonds of social transactions. Thus, while exploring their forms of relatedness *merging,* rather than the distinguishing of the social categories of kinship and friendship, what is given and what is made becomes significant (cf. Carsten 2004, 144). Above I have shown three different ways – the single women's self-help group, informal network of Sheela and the women's organisation – of forming relatedness by integrating elements from the social categories used to characterize kinship and friendship.

Despite the diversity of relatedness described above, all single divorced or separated women seek to be encompassed into the *wholeness of relations*, to be related to other women, either in more equal ways like Sheela with her friends or in more hierarchical ways like Amrita or Rathamma in the women's organisation. The relations and the people – other single women, friends, or women activist – with whom the single divorced and separated women can relate to through intensive interaction and transactions of food, services and the sharing of experiences are a *necessity* to them in order to exist and in order to turn from relation*less* women into the real "related persons" of their basic existence (see earlier). Without relatedness and interdependence a person becomes dead to the social world, such like a renouncer (see e.g. Dumont 1980, 184-185). *Thus, even if a family is not a necessity to all women, relationships and belonging to the larger wholeness is.* This questions the voluntary and negotiable nature of their relatedness that in general characterizes, for example, friendship relations as a youth phenomenon: friends are *additional* to family and kinship relations (Sääväla 2005, 10; Osella & Osella 1998; 2000, 228-231). According to Osella & Osella (2000, 228), the friendship is a momentary phase of egalitarian principles, breaking down social distance and posing a perceived threat to the hierarchical and ordered values of wider society before the "normal" rules of hierarchy are reasserted, for example, by arranged marriage (Osella & Osella 2000, 228). Thus, despite the different nature of youth friendship to the relatedness of the single

living women, both display the dialectical process of questioning and readjusting kinship structures and hierarchies.

As a matter of fact, a reason (marital breakdown in their case) which excludes them from the conventional family hierarchies and family structure becomes a key to their participation and transactions in the unconventional "wholeness" of divorced and separated women. There they can be "themselves" and, yet, respectful and whole persons. The more the women bind themselves to other people in a similar kind of situation, the more potency they have for sharing substance through transactions and the more "reflection sites" for their self-representations. Thanks to their relatedness, the women start to represent themselves more confidently as divorced or separated women and, yet, fully capable of being respectful persons. Many women described how they have *"changed themselves"* with the help of their multiple activities and with the support of other women. They have improved their practical skills, become more courageous, self confident and capable of dealing with their lives and with potential problems. These women talk about themselves as *"fighters"*, *"feminists"*, women's rights activists, *"bold"* and/or *"responsible"* women and only seldom as *"victims"*. They also act surprisingly bravely when moving around the city, even after the dark when everyone advised me to stay inside. They claim that they are not afraid anymore. They view Bangalore or their neighbourhood as being a safe place as – there are always other people moving around. As regards their housing a security guard stands outside their apartment blocks and the city taxi can be ordered in advance and is certainly a safe way to travel, even at night. Some feel that their networks with other women as well as the shared experiences with them have given them a feeling of security. Besides, they know who to approach if they face any troubles. Some have role models in the groups they associate themselves with whereas others – or later the same women– become role models to others themselves. In comparison, those divorced and separated women who have not related themselves to other divorced women are more trapped with the stereotypical representation of divorced women which they want to differentiate themselves from by declaring, *"I am not a typical divorced woman."*

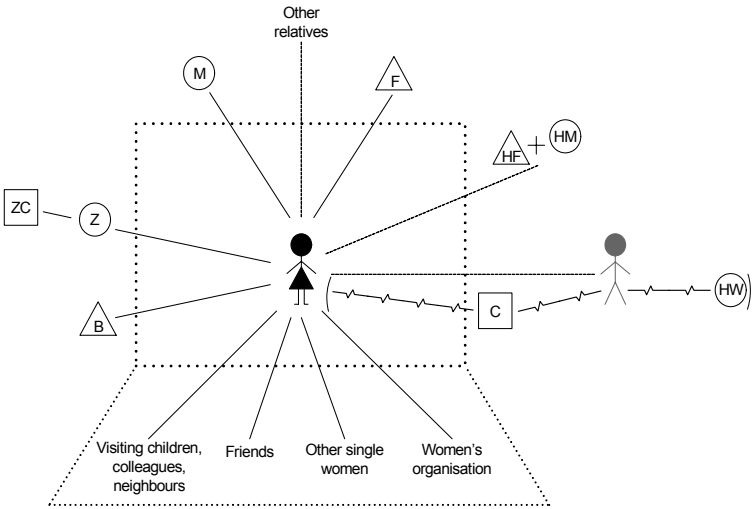
Moreover, the women's ability to ignore other people's *"talks"* and opinions is a proof of courage and the self-esteem they have gained through alternative transactions with other divorced and separated women. Importantly, the women who present themselves as more self-suf-

ficient persons also highlight that their self-sufficiency is based on their bonds with the people of their choice and it was in their best interests: the wholeness they shared with others. As mentioned earlier, most of these single women do social work or had plans to do it in the future, and so they want to give their unique experiences, precious time or individual talents for the benefit of others, particularly to other women in trouble. As Mines (1994, 188) points out in his study of Tamils, individuality finds expressions within the context of a social group, including the family, and identity and reputation involve an interaction between the person as a separated individual, responsible for his or her identity and actions, and the identity and reputation of groups such as the family, which support and benefit its members. In this context, the social group of divorced and separated women is analogous to the 'family' of Mines's example.

As described earlier, the home does not feel really like one's own without its relations and without other people. Correspondingly, the relational women need others and significant relations in order to be themselves and to achieve their agency through responsibility. Their activities and relations outside of the home, particularly, among other divorced and separated women tied them to a web of significant relations that they missing at home. A Chart 8.1 illustrates an example of the central kinship bonds and tensions in a reconstructed single home. As the borders of homes, like the borders of people, are said to be blurred in India, the single women's "house flows" across the borders of their homes: these women were able to carry on significant relations based on intimate sharing and reciprocity that usually construct homes and persons living *in* homes *along with them outside their homes*. As described earlier in Chapters 6 and 7, a "relational person's" agency is directed towards others and their homemaking is directed towards the responsibility for other family members at home. However, the women living alone moved outside their homes in order to become responsible agents. They regained their self-worth and fulfilled their *duty as divorced women* by supporting other divorced or separated women outside of their homes – as the divorced and separated women have fulfilled their duties as wives, daughters and mothers in their various houses.

Chart 8.1:

An example of the central kinship bonds and tensions in a reconstructed single home



Legend

Ego (the divorced/ separated woman)

Ex-husband

○	Female
△	Male
M	Mother
F	Father
Z	Sister/sisters
B	Brother/brothers
C	Child/children
H	Husband
W	Wife

Boundaries of the house

Ego's most central bonds

Ego's important but more neutral bonds

Ego's loosened or weakened bonds

Ego's bonds with tensions

As the single divorced and separated women's homemaking seek to connect and to structure their homes, they also seek to establish themselves as a part of a wholeness – either as a member of more egalitarian network or group (based on mutual reciprocity; shared life situations

or life experiences, similar class-background) or as a member of a more hierarchical group (based on a helper-helped –relationship; hierarchical organisation structure). Being a member of the social group makes them contextualised; not marginalised, isolated or lonely. Thus, only as a part of a wholeness – as a part of a structure are the divorced and separate women able to find the stability and meaning for their actions that they strive for (see earlier, fighting against loneliness). At the same time, as a part of this wholeness they are able create meaningful self-representations as well as to construct themselves through transactions and sharing. However, the general base of wholeness – the hierarchy – is questioned at least in the some of these relationships.

The relatedness among the single divorced and separated women does not compose a new form of kinship nor does it always fit into a category of friendship and, yet, it is a highly important form of relatedness to these women in their everyday lives regarding their physical and emotional existence; as well as to their construction of personhood. This should alert us to the importance of exploring relations beyond the conventional web of kinship. I suggest that relatedness of the single divorced and separated women can be understood as a "continuum" based on the varying mixture of different elements of relatedness in an area betwixt and between kinship and friendship. It takes characteristics from both the social categories of kinship and friendship and, among the different women, the various compositions are created in different phases of life. Within the continuum of relatedness the "voluntary" nature of substance-sharing among friends vis-a-vis the definite role of substance-sharing in kin relations are both questioned by the consequences of the divorce or separation. In practice, categorical kin relations *can be* questioned or even terminated (at least temporarily) but they are then replaced by another kind of "relatedness" which again can be served or replaced by the re-created relations of real kin (e.g. new marriage) or "fictive" kin (e.g. the women activists, adoption). Simultaneously, the relatedness of the divorced and separated women – its forms and significance – is transforming ideas and ideologies as well as practices of kinship within the continuum. It supports the idea presented earlier (see Chapter 7) that bonds based on social connections and transactions may become more significant markers of relatedness than biological, blood bonds which, as such, is a further challenge to the prevailing ideology of patrilineal kinship. Moreover, "relatedness" of the single divorced and separated women indicates the fluidity of relational personhood as well as

fluidity of the relatedness; a continuum of relations from kin to friends to associates of networks and organisations. As houses are better characterised as house*flows* than house*holds* (cf. Trawick 1996, 87), persons can also be understood as a points of confluence of different forms of relatedness, some substituting for the loss of others.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Marital breakdown is an anomaly in South India. It uncovers the existing gender and kinship hierarchies and shows the interplay between the divorced and separated women and their hierarchical society in South India; between the actors and structure. It shows us how the frames of the structures are bent and how the hierarchical positions are, ultimately, not entirely static.

All the divorced and separated women of this study are the survivors of marriages and marital breakdowns or they are at least in the process of surviving. We can only guess what may have happened to the "failures": have they been murdered in their marriages, have they committed suicide, have they died neglected; have they ended up becoming sex workers, or have they simply hid their background, unable to face the social stigma? The better socio-economic situation and more social support a woman has, particularly from her natal family, the more potential she has for leaving the abusive husband and for her further surviving. Moreover, a woman's chances of taking her child/children along and of having a relatively decent place to go are crucial to all women. The very least that women need for initial surviving after a marital breakdown is a place to stay, money for living, social relations and support. The poorest women have the worst living conditions and the weakest chances to live "a full comfortable life" as hoped for by one of my upper middle class informants. Their life stories are dominated by several serious problems caused by an insecurity that, in fact, never seemed to end but only changed the form of the problems - first after the marriage and then after the marital breakdown. On the other hand, the woman of better socio-economic backgrounds suffer from material uncertainly, a lack of social relations and feelings of being socially stigmatised because

they also consider it as a drastic change to their previous life situation. However, these women usually have more material and social capital, a wider social circle and kinship network and thus more support behind them. As my informants reveal, a bigger flow of money contributes to a bigger flow of support from relatives and friends due to the importance of ritual and material reciprocity. Paradoxically, the poorer and lonelier a woman was, the more difficult it was for her to get initial support, even from the women's organisations and police. After a marital breakdown all women need emergency help in order to maintain their dignity: the poorer women need practical support to meet the basic needs of their family whereas the women of a better socio-economic background need support to find the tools to reach "their standard" of living. The very attitude of considering a woman as a person, with her unique personal history and with her unique network of familial and social relationships, could be a breakthrough in helping her through women's organisations and help centres as well as through the police procedures and legal system. Furthermore, each woman's situation should be considered within the context of her post-affinal family, or the lack of it. Divorced and separated mothers should be supported in such a way as to enable them to keep their children or to at least be able to maintain contact with them as this seems to be a key to their surviving. Further, the women need different kinds of help during the different phases of their surviving. Thus, it is important to note the diversity of both the divorced and separated women and their life situations.

However, noting the diversity should not make us blind to seeing what these divorced and separated women have in common. Lately, particularly since the 1990's, there has been a tendency to emphasise the differences among the various groups of Indian women, based their cultural, social, religious or regional backgrounds in order to avoid presenting a "monolithic" picture of "an Indian woman" – a representation that does not exist in real life. Thanks to the valuable postcolonial critics (e.g. Mohanty 1991), the scholars have been very careful not to replicate the one-sided image of "the average third-world woman". Consequently, I also emphasise the importance of the constant contextualisation of this study, as well as of my informants, within the gender and kinship hierarchies of South India and the environment of urban and legal pluralism. Yet, I also consider it as important to look for the similarities between women of different social and cultural backgrounds because of the com-

mon denominator of their marital breakdowns. This kind of approach challenges the communal politics that consider religion as a main determinator of a person's social position. Consequently, despite the women's different socio-economic, religious and regional backgrounds this study emphasises – also through negation – the significance of being a wife and of having a husband to each of these South Indian women. Therefore the women, from the richest to the most impoverished; from the most highly-educated and sophisticated to the most illiterate women; from their various religious backgrounds: all tolerated severe harassment throughout their marriages and their threshold of leaving the marriage was very high. The importance of being a wife is further strengthened by the importance of being a mother and of having a home and thus being "related" with other people through intimate sharing and interaction. In contrast to the Euro-American experience, the initiators of marital breakdown are often men in India. The Indian proverb "there are only two castes: men and women" highlights that the inequality between men and women is so enormous that it overpowers differences between the women. The significance of wifehood in the South Indian environment leads to my suggestion that there is such a thing as a South Indian marital breakdown. Although the women of different religious communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi) each have their own religious personal laws concerning marriage and divorce, they share similarities in their ways of constructing wifehood. Therefore the practical reasons and consequences of marital problems are often similar in different religious groups. For example, although polygamy is prohibited among Hindus yet allowed among Muslims, it takes places in both communities, particularly among the poorer people. However, according to those women of my study who experienced it, it was never personally accepted. The practice of dowry – and any consequential dowry harassment – is another example of the practice that takes place across religious borders, despite the legal sanctions. Further, although among the Hindus and Christians of India marriage is initially considered as an indissoluble sacrament whereas among Muslims it is regarded as a civil contract, the women of all these communities are socially stigmatised after a marital breakdown and their chances of remarriage are low. For example, although remarriage gains more approval among Muslims at an ideological level, the wife usually becomes pregnant relatively soon after the marriage which complicates the matter on a practical level.

This study has also explored other contradictions between the rule of law and the use of law as well as the consequences of legal practices on the everyday lives of the divorced and separated women. The women use the law as their resource towards achieving multiple goals that also lead to unintended practical consequences. As the law courts constitute a type of institutionalised and formalised site for power struggles, the people with their particular concerns become part of these struggles. Due to the pluralistic legal systems and unbalanced power structures, the law is not equal to everyone nor does it give "justice" to all. Yet, the law is an important resource of the divorced and separated women in order to regulate their social relatedness and to construct their "relational" personhood – and to achieve something they need: freedom from a husband, reunion with the husband, contact with the children, status, money, justice compensation or even just revenge. Thus, although legislation can not lead to the improvement of a woman's position with regard to marriage and marital breakdown automatically, it does provide one important tool and justification for it. The legislation and the accessibility of a divorce decree or other decrees does influence whether the women initiate the legal process, as shown in this study. As the importance of wifehood is so central to Indian women and the women of different religious backgrounds share similar kinds of family problems as well as the similar consequences of marital breakdown, their family laws should also be reformed in order to be consistent. Thus, I agree with the demands of the Indian women's movement for a Uniform Civil Code. However, the suggestions of the different sections and communities of the pluralistic women's movement should be taken into account carefully while planning any such reform. Alternatively, if the constituting of the Uniform Civil Code turns out to be too huge a political challenge, another option is to improve the legislation of each community, one by one, by paying attention to the particular problems of each community as, in the laws of all the communities, women have less rights than men in certain corresponding situations. In any case, attention should be directed to the practical usefulness and gendered consequences of each law reform and to explore legal processes and court practices from different points of view. A current relevant angle to study this from would be to explore the impact of the reform of the Christian divorce laws (from the Indian Divorce Act 1869 to the Indian Divorce (Amendment) Bill 2001) on the everyday lives of Christian women – to answer the questions of whether it has given them

more potential to negotiate their position both within marriage and after a marital breakdown: whether it has increased the number of divorces among Christians and to consider whether this is a positive or negative occurrence from their point of view?

Marital breakdown destroys a woman's relational field and forces her to recreate substitutive relations in a flexible way. Even if a husband is not a necessity to a woman, relationships and belonging to a larger wholeness and a web of significant relations is. I have shown how the women of different religious backgrounds presented themselves as victims in the different phases of their recoveries and how they overcame their crises by becoming Indian actors through their particular kinds of hierarchical as well as equal relationships, based on intimate sharing and reciprocity, both within kin and beyond kin. As there is something like caste among non-Hindus and, as this study shows, the similarities in the cultural construction of the wife – and the anomalous status of non-wife – among different socio-religious groups of South India, I further suggest that the idea of constructing persons through interaction and sharing may make sense even among other religious groups in the South Indian environment as well. In the urban context generally and among divorced and separated women particularly, the people of different castes and religions are not only interacting more and more with each other but they may also share something important with each other, for example, a similar life-situation, cultural background or interests; or same neighbourhood or profession etc. The "sameness" they often share, makes them willing and able to embrace other significant forms of sharing and interaction as well – talking, sharing experiences, helping each other, participating in the same events, eating together, celebrating and sharing everyday as well as religious rituals together – as the divorced and separated women of this study did. I suggest that these forms of sharing and interacting involve sharing of substances as well. Consequently, the substances are becoming more and more mixed among people of different levels of hierarchies and thus the ensuing horizontal relationships are challenging the dominance of the prevailing hierarchical relationships in cities like Bangalore.

This study has followed the divorced and separated women from their natal homes to their affinal homes through homelessness and legal battles to their reconstructed natal, affinal or single homes in order to find out what it means to be a gendered person within hierarchical gender and kinship relations in South India. The study has shown that the relational

persons of South India are made up of intimate emotional and substantial connections with other people, places and things, particularly in their homes. The bonds of intimate interaction and sharing make up what a person is and have a fundamental importance for her/his construction of gender as well. The divorced and separated women "become women" through homely transactions and the puberty ceremony in their natal homes, then through marriage and the consummation of marriage and finally (in the cases of some of them) by becoming mothers in their affinal homes. The women are socialised and prepared to go through the gendered transformations of the life cycle: the ritual transformations of puberty and marriage, the physical transformations of becoming a wife through the "first night" and of becoming a mother through the birth giving and the social transformations of moving from the natal home to the affinal home and from the position of daughter to the positions of wife and daughter-in-law, and later, of mother and of mother-in-law. This transformability that characterises their gender, their womanhood eventually helps them to put up with an unexpected crisis such as a marital breakdown – crisis that changes the order of their lives. In fact, this feminine transformability and fluidity is both an asset and a hindrance to women's agency: it explains why divorce and separation affect women more severely than men. As shown in this study, the relational persons are dependent on interaction and sharing, thus, the women's transformability is dependent on other people with whom they share substances and create bonds through transactions. These fundamental bonds and interaction construct a woman's make up as a relational person. However, their "relatedness" can be the subject of manoeuvring. Throughout her life, a woman is strengthening some fundamental bonds while weakening others. For example, while getting married and creating the marital bond to her husband a woman loosens or weakens (but does not cut) her natal bonds. The marital bond is supported with the move to the affinal home and facilitated by the marriage ritual. To give another example, while becoming a mother and creating a bond with her child a woman may loosen or weaken (but does not cut) her bond to her husband by reducing the nature or frequency of their transactions which is reinforced by her return to the natal home for the delivery and for the three months of recovering from it and is facilitated by the rituals at the end of pregnancy and by the baby's name giving ceremony being organised by the natal family.

However, as the study shows, this kind of manoeuvring of bonds by loosening and strengthening them does not succeed on every occasion because of the kinship tensions embedded in the fundamental structures of kin relations. The harmony envisaged by the ideal of the complementary kinship structure is an unattainable goal for the most people in practice and the kinship expectations and tensions are common in all kin relations. However, as marital breakdown makes all kinship ideals unreachable and its consequences spread into all hierarchical as well as horizontal kinship relations, the conflicting and competing side of kin relations becomes accentuated through the divorced and separated women. Particularly the bond between a mother and child may eventually overpower the bond between the husband and wife: the mother-in-law does not always loosen her bond to her son and allow him to cultivate the marital bond with his wife (ego) and the wife's (ego) birth-giving and bond to the child may not only loosen the bond between a husband and wife but also cut it for good because the husband finds such substituting bonds that end the marital transactions. Moreover, the practical importance of the father-daughter / mother-daughter may bond subordinate the ideological importance of the brother-sister bond after the marital breakdown. The stronger the bond the more potency there is for kinship tensions that grow from the expectation of reciprocity. These expectations and tensions may lead to the hierarchy, competition or confusion of the fundamental bonds which often then lead to marital disharmony, marital breakdown or to conflicts of interest after the marital breakdown. I suggest that the manoeuvring of bonds helps the women to withstand the situation when the marital bond is breaking down. Although nothing can replace the broken bond to the husband, other bonds of intimate sharing and interaction (to the children, the natal family members, the friends, the women activists) can substitute for the loss of marital bond. This shows the flexibility embedded in the women's self-construction as relational persons in South India. As a consequence, the women are also able to create multiple self-representations as "divorcees", "wives", "singles", "widows", "mothers" "victims" and "actors" through interaction and to move between these self-representations and combine them: a woman may present herself both as a victim and as an actor or as both a divorcee and widow.

Kinship is both made and questioned in the urban homes of the divorced and separated women in South India. The gendered consequences

of marital breakdown suggest that despite the fact that prevalent patrilineal kinship is strong at the ideological level and the male-kin nucleus of father, brother, husband and son have higher hierarchical positions and more authority to influence their positions, the patrilineal kinship ideology is none-the-less under negotiation at the practical, functional level. Ethnographic evidence of this study highlights the importance of women in regard to the South Indian kinship relations, both through negation and through affirmation. A female-kin nucleus of mother, sister, wife and daughter has a significant influence both in the natal and affinal home and within the family as a destroyer or as a guarantor of kin relations. The negative consequences of marital breakdown are mediated through women in the vertical as well as horizontal kin relations threatening the marriage chances of women in two generations, i.e. the divorced and separated women's sisters and their female cousins as well as divorced and separated women's daughters and their female cousins. On the other hand, the marital breakdown affirms the importance of women in regard to the South Indian kinship relations. It reveals the co-existing matrifocal tendencies in kin relations, which means that a mother and a mother's natal kin are given practical preference when the partilineal kinship ideology and the ideal of the complementary kinship relations fail to materialise in everyday life. In these matrifocal kin relations, social connections and substantial transactions of nursing, feeding, caring, supporting that go on between a mother and a child are given preference over descent. These matrifocal kin relations challenge the idea that kinship is traced through the male line by the following consequences of marital breakdown, as presented through the ethnography of this study: Firstly, the mothers' support for daughters becomes highlighted throughout this study as well as the continual importance of the natal family and home, i.e. "mother home", an expressions used in English, that emphases the mother's influence in the home. The mothers – both the mothers of the divorced and separated women as well as the divorced and separated women as mothers – even more strongly than the fathers took their daughter's side even against the overall kin if there was a conflict of interest. Secondly, mothers, sisters and daughter's of the same natal family can substitute for each other in important rituals and social roles when the conventional order of kinship is confused or ruined by a family tragedy. Thirdly, a newborn child, the issue descended of the husband's patriline is often left to the woman in her natal home (and thus, is in the care of

the woman's mother as well) if the marriage breaks down immediately after the birth of the child. Moreover, the issue of the husband does not ensure the woman's position in her husband's family but may ruin it instead. Fourthly, the husband (or his family) is not usually eager to gain the custody of the child if the husband has left the house. Instead, children are considered to belong to their mother, self-evidently. Fifthly, if the child/children are living with the woman, the husband or his family do not take responsibility for arranging the marriage of his child/children and, thus, to ensure the continuity of the patriline – rather it is the women, along with their natal families and relatives, who carry out the responsibility. Finally, the marriage does not break the woman's bonds to her natal family whereas the marital breakdown does often cut the woman's bonds to her husband as well as his family and kin – always if the couple do not have children and sometimes even when they have children. All this shows that although according to the prevalent partilineal kinship ideology in most communities, the children belong to their fathers and to their fathers' line, in practice the children of divorced couples belong to their mothers more often and they are more attached the natal families of their mothers through everyday interaction and sharing. The small children are considered as the appendix of their mothers, not their fathers, when the actors and consequences of life are in disharmony with kinship structures or ideals. These children grow older within an influence and close interaction with their mothers and their mothers' natal kin. This supports the idea that bonds based on social connections and transactions with mothers are more significant markers of relatedness than inheritance as indicated by patrilineal kinship ideology. *Marital breakdown strengthens matrifocal tendencies in kin relations.* When there is marital breakdown, kinship is mediated through women and remould by women. The ideological importance of partilineal kinship is balanced by bilaterality due to the practical importance of the natal family: matrifocal tendencies in kin relations often become manifested when the things do not proceed according to plan.

The women's primary roles as creators, bearers and destroyers of the kin – as wives, sisters, mothers, mothers-in-laws, sisters-in-law – has been noted as a reason to protect as well as to dominate them. However, this study has shown the weak points of both protection and domination. The kinship relations, network and support cannot ensure the women's protection within marriage or after the marital breakdown. Some women

are left all alone and other women's interests are sacrificed for the sake of kin. The conflicts of interest between the overall kin and the parents of divorced and separated women show tensions embedded within the smaller units of larger kin. Furthermore, the ethnographic evidence of the study shows how male domination can never be so all-inclusive that it leaves no space for the woman's agency and for woman's efforts to question that domination, at least over a length of time and taking into account her personal development through interaction and sharing with others. Moments such as "the turning point" help the woman to re-evaluate her vision of the gender relations and to evoke her action in order to reformulate her position within them. Thus, the divorced and separated women, as well as to some extent their mothers and daughters, challenge the prevalent kinship ideology simply by their existence but even more so by their actions. Not only the divorced and separated women but also some of their mothers are "relational individuals" who direct their agency and protection on behalf of the significant others (such as their daughters) and, thus, they too shake the social order based on the kinship and gender hierarchies. This shows the significant links between mothers and daughters as well as the importance of studying kin relations from generation to generation.

The divorced and separated women use the cultural and social structures of their society creatively in order to improve their situation. They re-negotiate gender relations both in their own lives and in the surrounding society, both in the domestic and public spheres, for example, by adopting the prestigious family roles of sons or fathers and by the means of legal procedures and public demonstrations and by the other activities of women's organisations. Due to the existing power structure of gender and kinship hierarchies, the consequences of the divorced and separated women's agency, strategies and manipulation of the socio-cultural or legal structures of their society may be in contrast to their initial intentions. Nevertheless, the divorced and separated women shake that power structure, renegotiate existing social order and create room for further cultural and social changes. Their marital breakdown and, particularly, their reconstructed "relatedness" and its consequences show the transformability of persons as well as societies.

I suggest that the transformation of social and kin relations will continue because marital breakdown may become a more common occurrence in Bangalore and even broaden further in South India and con-

sequently the number of love marriages as well as the number of single women will also increase. Despite the importance of wifehood in South India, the conditions of wifehood are changing. Some divorced and separated women contrast their marital problems with those of their own mothers and conclude that their mothers had to put up with even more than they have had to. Particularly, the upper and middle class divorced and separated women consider that they have today more chance of negotiating their living conditions regarding the house, money and social relations after a marital breakdown because of their education and job opportunities and as a result of the structure and social networks of the city. Although divorce is not considered acceptable, neither is a husband's violence or extramarital affairs. The women who take the initiative in the breakdown of marriage are often educated, have a job or the potential to get one and they have their parents support – and these things are all interconnected. The longer the daughter stays with her natal family, the stronger the bonds that are created. I suggest that smaller families, a better education and an increase of income among middle and upper-middle class families in South Indian cities (see Säävälä 2007a; 2007b) contributes significantly to the parents investments in their daughters' education, upbringing, a dowry and marriage expenses. These transactions of love encompass the idea of reciprocity – they expect their daughters to be the recipients of love and affection from their husbands and in-laws in their affinal homes. In the case of failure, the parents usually support their daughters, particularly in the case of arranged marriages. In general, all divorced and separated women, from different socio-economic backgrounds, emphasise the importance of education, particularly, for their sisters and daughters in order to stand on their own feet and not to tolerate harassment in the marriage. In all groups of the women, the taboo of divorce has prevented divorced or separated women from knowing about one another; and others from knowing about divorcees. The divorced and separated women of this study have begun to break the silence. The more divorced and separated women know about one another, the easier it will be for them to be open about their marital problems and marital breakdown. As this study shows, knowing about other women's problems and, particularly, organising or networking with them gives women relief, support and courage. This could gradually lead to a greater acceptance of divorce as an unfortunate but not unavoidable state of affairs and the abolishment of the stigma attached to divorced or separated women.

I further suggest that because of martial breakdown, love marriages may become more common and socially acceptable. As shown in this study, the negative consequences of marital breakdown threaten the marriage chances of other women within post-affinal families (sisters and daughters) and kin (cousins). This may lead to an increase in love marriages and, particularly, in love marriages where the parents of a couple give their approval. At least it seems that many divorced and separated women are now ready to accept their daughters being involved in love marriages. The divorced and separated women of love marriages consider love marriage to be the only option for their daughters, as each generation is pushed further away from the family network of marriage arrangements. The divorced and separated women emphasise the content of marriage – and chances of marriage – more that the form of marriage. Love marriages especially often take place without a dowry, and yet they may turn a daughter into a wife and a potential mother. Finally, a love marriage seems to be the only true option for those divorced and separated women who want to remarry. Although some of them have tried to find a new partner through matrimonial advertisements, those divorced and separated women of this study who have remarried or lived permanently with a new partner (5) have usually found their new partners of love marriages in their working places. Further, the consequences of marital breakdown increase the numbers of educated single women in Bangalore as there is an increase in divorced and separated women themselves as well as their family members who either do not wish to marry, or who do not succeed in marrying at all. In fact, as the system of dowry is seen as injurious to a woman's position through the prejudice and violence associated with it. The increase and acceptance of dowry-less love marriages may contribute positively to a woman's position in general (see also Tenhunen 2007). Overall, the impact of marital breakdowns spreads far and causes transformations in social and kin relations and in marriage practices over generations – these transformations would be worth analysis and evaluation through further studies.

Initially, the divorced and separated women seldom chose to become reformers. Most of them would have preferred to have been obedient wives and re-producers of prevalent kinship and gender hierarchies and ideologies. Due to marital breakdown, they are nevertheless "forced" to become actors in order to survive. As such, they demonstrate to us the creativity of the women's – and other structurally dominated actors

– agency both specially and also generally. The South Indian relational female actors or relational "individuals" struggle because of other people and on behalf of people, particularly other women. Simultaneously, they are able to manoeuvre their "substance" or "fluid personhood" through interaction and transactions with the right kind of people: sisters, mothers, other selected and trusted relatives, good friends, empathic colleagues or neighbours, women activists and other "decent" divorced women. Through interaction and sharing with them the lessons of marital breakdown are taken into account. The divorced and separated women renew the marriage system by opposing dowry, by emphasising a woman's right to decide and by supporting other women facing marital problems. Many of them feel it is their duty to question principles that are otherwise taken for granted, to suggest alternatives and to introduce more or less subversive changes to gender and kinship roles, particularly, with regard to a woman's position. These challenging ideas and practices spread through interaction and sharing with those with whom they are intimate. Seniority of life experience improves the divorced and separated women's status. Simultaneously, they renegotiate the gender and kinship hierarchies not only by divorcing but also by their recommendations that gives value to the women, and, particularly, by their own example and by giving their own experiences for the use of other women. I suggest that these transactions and sharing provide the basis for the greater acceptance of divorce and the abolishing of the stigma attached to divorced and separated women and, thus, to the improvement of the women's position in general. The social order of kinship and gender hierarchies can be challenged from the bottom of it. This lesson is of relevance to feminist research as well. Although the study reveals the painful history of women's ill-treatment in marriage, family and kinship systems, it demonstrates the women's rejection of the domination; and shows their ability to re-negotiate and promote changes not only to their own positions but to the whole hierarchical system as well. The focus on the margins of the kinship relations revitalises kinship studies. It emphasises the importance of looking between the structures and highlights the worth of looking beyond the kinship rules and into the "exceptions" to the rules, which are, as I suggest, as frequent as the rules themselves. As I have shown, although the exceptions are hard to pin down, they are of great consequence: ignoring them may in fact distort kinship theory. Moreover, this study demonstrates that examining something truly significant in Indian

society such as personhood, gender or law, or the interplay between an agent and the structure, leads us to study kinship. This keeps the study of kinship at the heart of anthropology in India and makes the renewal of it an anthropological mission.

Appendix 1

List of Informants

Pseudonym	Background Description	Living situation 1996/2000
Aisa	M, 26, m, d/c, 1c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s (+ her child)
Amrita	H, 31, l, s/u, 2c, arranged marriage	With her child/children
Anita	C/H, 43, u, d/j-, 0c, love marriage	Alone
Aruna	C, ~45, u, s/u, 2c, love marriage	With her child/children
Christina	C, ~35, m, s/u, 2c, love marriage	With her child/children
Debi	C, 46, u, s/j, 2c, arranged marriage	Alone
Elisabeth	C, 42, m, s/u, 0c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s
Fatma	M, 35, p, s/u, 5c, arranged marriage	With her child/children
Gita	H, ~35, u, d/j, 0c, love marriage	Alone
Hemalatha	H, 30, u, d/j-, 0c, arranged marriage	Alone
Honamma	H, 42, p, d/c, 5c, arranged marriage	With her child/children
Jyothi	H, 26, m, d/j, 1c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s (+ her child)
Kalawati	H/C, ~45, p, s/u + w, 6c, forced marriage	With her child/children
Kalpana	H, 29, m, d/j, 0c /1996 + H, 33, m, d/j, 0c /2000, arranged marriage	With her parent/s

Kamala	C, 39, m, s/u, 3c, arranged marriage	With her child/children
Kaniz Fatima	M,~30, p, d/c + s/u, 3c, arranged marriage + forced marriage	With her child/children
Kiran	H, 24, u, d/j-, 0c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s
Kusum	H, 38, p, s/u, 3c, arranged marriage	With her child/children
Lalithamma	H, 43, m, s/j-, 4c, love marriage	With her child/children
Latha	H, 29, l, s/u, 4c, arranged marriage	Alone
Leela	H, 25, u, d/j, 0c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s
Madhu	H, 38, m, s/u, 0c /1996 + H, 42, m, d/j, 0c/2000, arranged marriage	Alone With her parent/s
Manika	H, 27, m, s/u, 0c /1996 + H, 31, m, d/j, 0c /2000, arranged marriage	With her parent/s Alone
Manjula	H, 43, m, d/j, 2c, love marriage	With her parent/s (+ her children)
Nandita	H, 50, u, s/u, 3c, love marriage	Alone
Neera	H,~30, m, d/j, 0c, love marriage	With her parent/s
Nirmala	H, 43, u, d/j, 0c /1996 + H, 47, u, d/j, 0c /2000, arranged marriage	Alone
Padma	H , 50, p, s/u, 5 c (1 died), arranged marriage	With her child/children (+ her mother)
Parsadi	H, 36, m, s/u, 3c, love marriage	With her child/children

Parvati	H, 32, p, s/u, 4c, love marriage	With her ex-husband
Pushpa	H, 30, m, d/j-, 2c, arranged marriage	Alone
Raja	C, 27, m, s/u, 0c, arranged marriage	With her brother
Rathamma	H, 45, m, d/j-, 3c/1996 H, 49, m, d, 3c/2000, arranged marriage	Alone With her child/children
Rossy	C, 63, u, d/j + s/u, 2c love marriage + love marriage	Alone
Safia	M, 35, m, d/c, 0c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s
Salema	M, 24, p, s/u, 1c, arranged marriage	With her child/children
Sarab	H, ~30, l, d/j-, 1c, arranged marriage	With her brother (+her child)
Satyanarain	H, 47, u, s/u, 2c, love marriage	With her child/children
Savitri	H, 41, u, d/j, 0c, love marriage	Alone
Sayabiran	M, ~36, p, s/u, 4c (one died), arranged marriage	With her child/children (+ her mother)
Shabana	H, 31, u, d/j-, 1c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s (+ her child)
Shanti Devi	H, ~25, u, d/j, 0c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s
Sheela	C, 54, m, d/j, 1c, love marriage	With her child/children
Sulabha	H, 31, u, s/u, 1c /1996 + H, 35, u, d/j, 1c /2000, arranged marriage	Alone
Sumitra	H, 39, u, d/j, 0c, arranged marriage	Alone

Sunita	H, 45, lm, s/u, 3c, arranged marriage	With her brother (+ her children)
Sushilamma	H, ~30, m, s/u, 3c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s
Tarak	H, 39, m, d/j-, 2c, arranged marriage	Alone
Veena	H, 33, u, d, 1c, arranged marriage	With her parent/s (+ her child)
Zameela Begum	M, ~45, l, d/c, 5c, arranged marriage	With her child/children

A brief background description of my informants: **H**indu/**M**uslim/**C**hristian, age, **u**pper middle class/**m**iddle class/**l**ower middle class/**p**oorer, **s**eparated/**d**ivorced/**u**nofficially/**j**udicially in court (incomplete legal process marked with **-**)/ by **c**ustomary law out of court, number of children. For example, H, 47, u, s/u, 2 c means Hindu, 47 years, upper middle class, separated/unofficially, 2 children.

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